

# George Floyd Uprising Reader

## Vol.2 Belligerent Identities in the Face of Counter-Insurgency



*Thank you for opening this reader.*

A group of anarchists and autonomists in the Bay Area/occupied Ohlone land collected writings animated by the 2020 uprisings that ignited the so-called United States after the police murder of George Floyd. Our intention is that this reader inspires people everywhere to engage in deeper conversations about all aspects of the uprising, including its significance and context to the US Black Liberation struggle. We believe these discussions are vital to shaping ongoing and future struggles, improving tactics, and rendering ineffective the insidious narratives that aim to crush our collective power.

We have organized these selected writings into two volumes:

**Volume 1: Insurgency and Beyond** shares on-the-ground accounts from various sites of struggle; the challenges faced, victories won, analysis sharpened, and lessons learned. Each writing, specific to its physical and cultural landscape, affirms the necessity of insurrection while grappling with its impermanent nature and the questions of how we move forward together from such eruptions.

**Volume 2: Belligerent Identities in the Face of Counter-Insurgency** examines identity politics, Black anarchists' role in the uprisings, the racialized nature of "looting", among other dynamics. The concept of Belligerent Identities is taken from the *Latin Bellum Gerere* which translates as "to wage war", a term for guerrilla soldiers used by the state. If a belligerent identity is that of the enemy combatant, then we seek to reclaim and weaponize this term. The writings in this volume speak to how the far-right, police, state, media, and liberals use everything from live ammunition to tired rhetoric to douse the flames of rebellion and diffuse the potentials of solidarity.

As non-Black anarchists and autonomists gathering and framing writings about an uprising that is centered around Black liberation, our positionality lends itself to a possibility of missing important elements and perspectives. However, we hope that you find this reader thought-provoking. Through critical analysis and fierce practice, may the fire in our hearts burn brighter as we love stronger and fight smarter in our collective struggle for liberation.

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## **II. BELLIGERENT IDENTITIES IN THE FACE OF COUNTERINSURGENCY**

Some questions to frame your reading:

*The radical origins of identity politics (as put forth by the Combahee River Collective) has often been co-opted by the state and liberalism for the purpose of reinforcing division between people. How do we use identity as a starting point for understanding and connection while fighting back against the ways it is used against us?*

*How do the state's strategies of counterinsurgency reveal its greatest vulnerabilities?*

*Who is choosing belligerency in the face of white supremacy and the state, and what role could people's identity play in this choice?*

*How do we foster true solidarity without flattening differences and lived experiences?*

*Given the history and current reality of white supremacy and anti-Blackness, what are the most meaningful ways for non-Black anarchists and autonomists to participate in the fight for Black Lives? How do we engage in struggle in a way that prioritizes those most impacted without falling into tokenization and essentialism?*

# **Part 1.**

## **Counterinsurgency in Practice**





*Protestor faces off with a line of riot cops in Washington, DC. May 30, 2020  
(Photo: Stephanie Kenner)*

# COUNTERINSURGENCY: : DOUSING THE FLAMES OF MINNEAPOLIS

Peter Gelderloos

The uprising that has spread across the United States since the police murder of George Floyd on May 25 in Minneapolis has, like any rebellious movement, met with police strategies for counterinsurgency. It is well documented how modern police forces systematically use counterinsurgency strategies against their own populations.

The most visible counterinsurgency measure so far has been the campaign of straightforward, brutal repression: the thousands of people arrested and injured by police and National Guard across the country, as well as the handful of Black people who have been murdered since May 25, shot to death by cops or white vigilantes. Nonetheless, people have courageously held their own, staying in the streets, redistributing wealth through looting and mutual aid initiatives, supporting one another with horizontally

\*We wanted to acknowledge that the word “blind” is used in this section in some places in an ableist way. We urge everyone to examine how ableism is often prevalent in our language (and spaces), and to do better at incorporating disability justice frameworks into our politic.

organized first aid and legal support, disabling police vehicles and infrastructure in order to physically remove cops' ability to cause harm, and destroying many of the businesses that led to gentrification, exclusion and police violence in the first place.

Needless to say, this is an incredible feat. Amidst such a dangerous, brutalizing, potentially traumatizing situation, collective strength is what gets people through. That is why it is the other side of counterinsurgency, the one that divides movements against themselves, that is the most pernicious at times like these — especially since it is often movement participants who enable and reproduce such measures.

## NONVIOLENCE

Since British colonial wars in Kenya and India, police strategists have identified the need to keep resistance movements arrested at the level of nonviolence or simple verbal dissent. This is a fundamental function of counterinsurgency: treating society like a hostile population and keeping it from rising up.

In earlier rebellions against police murders, mayors, police chiefs and would-be protest leaders were united from the very first hours in declaring that only symbolic protest was a legitimate response. This happened in Oakland after the murder of Oscar Grant, and it happened in Ferguson after the murder of Mike Brown. Fortunately, we have come a long way. People have seen that the only time cops get charged for killing is if people riot. And we have also recovered histories of struggle that the dominant institutions had tamed and manipulated.

Now, we once again remember that nearly all our victories in the past, whether in the labor movement, anti-war movements, or even in the Civil Rights movement, came from riots, rebellions and wildcat actions, specifically those moments when we were uncontrollable.

For the first few days after the murder

of George Floyd, hardly anyone was openly advocating nonviolence, because of how clearly that would sound like putting property over Black lives. Even the mayor of Minneapolis, after block stores and a police station was burnt down, claimed to empathize with the anger of rioters.

To pacify this movement, subtler strategies were needed. In came the outside agitators.

## ABOLITIONISTS AND CRIMINAL IMMIGRANTS

The concept of the outside agitator is a very old trope. Some of its first uses were to delegitimize the rebellions of enslaved people, suggesting that Africans would not want to rebel on their own or would not be smart enough to do so, and were instead led into rebellion by nefarious white abolitionists from the North. Another early use was against anarchists, who were frequently immigrants, especially in the US movement, and as such, subject to xenophobic prejudices.

The trope of the outside agitator is a psychological operation meant to suggest that those who rebel have no legitimacy. Those who come from outside threaten the closed, localized system of oppressor and oppressed. The outsiders are imputed with evil, ulterior motivations, whereas the authorities are simply motivated by a desire to protect that closed system. And of course they want to protect it: as the oppressors in the closed system, they are the ones who benefit from it. Solidarity and collective power are discouraged, as people are impelled to distrust anyone who does not come from within a very small circle, family member or immediate neighbor. Obedience is normalized while rebellion is portrayed as something sinister.

Another disturbing element of the trope is the suggestion that white people are being irresponsible if they also want to fight against

slavery, and people born in other countries are suspect if they also claim to suffer under capitalism. The racist, classist implications translate well to the modern uses of the provocateur bogeyman.

The logic of counterinsurgency is spread across the political spectrum: everyone who has an officially recognized right to comment on the unfolding rebellion, everyone given a bullhorn by the mainstream media, has been warning about outside agitators. Trump does it, most police chiefs do it, Democratic mayors do it, even the progressive wing of the Democratic Party like Ilhan Omar and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez do it. The right wingers add the obviously anti-Semitic suggestion that George Soros funds these agitators, the “professional anarchists,” but all of them, nonetheless, are using a trope that is irremediably racist.

## WORKING FOR THE COPS

The most common iteration of this conspiracy theory that circulates among people who actually participate in movements against police brutality suggests that the outside agitators are actually the police themselves, agent provocateurs. How could blaming the cops for the violence possibly play into their hands?

This is in fact one of the most effective and also pernicious iterations of counterinsurgency discourse, precisely because people who spread it do not realize that they are favoring pacification and doing the cops’ work.

If it is just media and politicians claiming that our movements are invalid or our methods too extreme, that actually does not matter a lot, because in order to make a revolutionary change in society, we need to be strong enough to go against the media and the government anyway. It is when the movement turns against itself that we lose.

As I documented in *The Failure of Nonviolence*, signaling protesters as infiltrators,

even when it is done by pacifists, exposes them to violence. It is a signal to the crowd that the person singled out is a threat, and also an unreasonable force: they are not who they say they are. Rioters can in fact be both reasonable and polite. It is not all uncommon, in the midst of a riot, bonfires blazing, to hear people say things like, “don’t set that one on fire, it’s a cheap model, that’s not a rich person’s car,” or “hey, let’s grab those fire extinguishers, there are apartments above this bank office and we don’t want the fires getting to big.” Of course, more often than not, such conversations happen non-verbally, but commonly, part of the beauty of the riot is that strangers take care of one another.

However, when someone is accused of being an infiltrator, a false protester, dialogue becomes impossible because, a priori, honest communication is precluded by who they supposedly are. Those who spread this kind of accusation are actually hoping the crowd will rely on the uglier methods it has available to protect itself: beating up the supposed provocateur, and handing them over to the police.

This was exactly how the political parties imposed nonviolence on the Catalan independence movement in October 2017, using their massive resources to spread the rumor that police infiltrators were planning on committing violent acts in the protests. The degree of doublethink was undeniable: in the name of nonviolence, people assaulted those who began to carry out property destruction, proving that they did not logically believe such protesters were actual cops, or they never would have beat them up. Rather, the accusation of being a provocateur converted those protesters into homo sacer, people with no legitimacy or right to bodily integrity.

Ironically, those who engage in this kind of snitchjacketing are doing something very similar to what Amy Cooper did in Central Park, calling the police and lying about being threatened, knowing full well that the target of

her accusation faced police violence.

And we have already seen how protesters in various cities have assaulted demonstrators and given them over directly to the police for damaging property, once again valuing capital more than human life, which is the very kind of thinking that gives us police murders in the first place.

Another problem with this discourse is how it distracts from the greater violence. Honestly, who cares if someone is smashing a Target or looting a convenience store? People are getting murdered. Black folks have to live every day under the threat of sudden death. Those who focus on property destruction should be shamed for having their priorities so out of line.

Yes, rioting can be done well and it can be done poorly, in a way that endangers others. However, social media is not the place to air those criticisms, especially since we can never know if the criticism is coming from someone who was actually there, nor is it possible to know what is left out of the video they are sharing as proof of their accusation.

Often, criticisms are shared in the moment of the protest itself, and this can be effective if people start communicating on a good faith basis. Sometimes, however, you cannot communicate well in the chaos of a demo under full police assault. But serious social movements have other spaces in order to talk about conflicts like this and to educate newer folks on the best ways to engage in protests. Accepting that social media is a terrible place for such conversations would make it much easier to shut down the rumor mill before it starts.

There is yet another problem with the provocateur trope: it spreads the idea that the police need a justification to attack demonstrators and kill people. That is the common element to this conspiracy theory, after all. Why are police supposedly smashing windows or leaving an empty patrol car for protesters to burn? So they can have a justification for breaking up the

protest.

When have police ever needed a justification? It is an absolute whitewash to claim that police even pretend to be reactive, only breaking out their arsenal when there could feasibly be the perception that they have a good reason to do so. What planet are these people living on? How many unarmed Black folks need to be murdered, how many peaceful protests have to be attacked by visibly sadistic cops for folks to get this notion of “justification” out of their heads? The idea that police are reactive, even if it is in a nefarious way, runs directly counter to the struggle to abolish the police.

## CONSPIRACIES THAT UNDERMINE ACTION

This kind of conspiratorial thinking also spreads the idea that we do not have agency, that the cops are the all powerful puppet masters and anything we do plays into their hands. This view decenters our own choices for how to respond. The most important question is not, what do the cops want us to do? The most important question is, how do the people most affected — Black and brown folks — need to respond to this systemic violence? And secondarily, what strategies do other folks have to support them, and to also push back against forms of state violence that do affect lighter-skinned people, given the complex intersections of oppression.

The cops are not infallible. They do use infiltrators. Most often to gather information, sometimes to carry out arrests, occasionally to provoke an action that can entrap people. Even if cops do engage in property destruction, this pales in comparison to all the times they urge protesters to be nonviolent. And when they infiltrate, they are hardly omnipotent puppet masters. Cops are often not all that intelligent. In fact, the 1905 Revolution in Russia was triggered in part by a police informant who got carried away. We need to be focusing on our own choices, our own needs, and our own strategies.



Without losing sight of our own goals, it helps to have an awareness of the enemy. It is probably no coincidence that progressive politicians, right-wing politicians and police chiefs all want us to be nonviolent. This does not mean we should blindly do the opposite of what we think they want, but neither should we be blind to what they are trying to do to us. The point of a counterinsurgency strategy is to pacify a rebellion that would be too difficult or too costly to annihilate through pure military force. Our goal should be to allow these rebellions to grow and express themselves freely, attacking oppressive structures and prefiguring the world we want.

To do that, it is necessary to raise awareness about how counterinsurgency strategies work. In a digital age, one of the most vital areas for improvement is to teach one another how to recognize conspiracy theories, and how to apply basic standards of evidence.

Just because someone on social media says a video is from a certain place or time, or shows a certain thing, does not mean this is true. In fact, social media “evidence” is extremely prone to suggestion. As documented here, the rumor that a black bloc protester was unmasked as a cop went viral after a 2012 protest in Madrid. It did not matter that in the video, one can see that the cop is not actually wearing a mask, and not dressed in typical black bloc fashion. The simple fact that the message accompanying the video made a claim about the cop’s appearance changed the perception of the hundreds of thousands of people who saw it.

It needs to become standard procedure, when people start spreading rumors based on flimsy evidence, to call it out and shut it down. We will be in a much stronger place once everyone recognizes that conspiracy theories are a right-wing tool, even when they seem

subversive. Who can forget the 9-11 Truther movement. What could be more subversive than accusing the government of murdering almost 3,000 of its own citizens? Over time, the right-wing bent of the conspiracy movement became undeniable: the theory promoted anti-Semitic confabulations, it was based on a high valuation of North American lives and an absolute apathy to a much greater number of Iraqi and Afghan lives lost, it distracted from the anti-war movement, and it led to the creation of a “Deep State” paranoia that Trump and similar right wingers use constantly.

## THE STRUGGLE IS RIGHT IN FRONT OF US

There is no hidden truth to discover. The reality is right in front of us. Police murder Black and brown people every day. They murder trans people. They murder folks with mental health problems. They murder homeless people. They enforce inequalities that allow some to amass insane amounts of wealth, leaving many more with no access to good healthcare or decent housing.

The movement that is fighting back against this reality is legitimate. The methods it is developing are legitimate.

There will be conflicts, there will be differences, but that is okay. What we cannot do is aid the counterinsurgency strategies that help the state divide and pacify this movement. The most important victories will be accomplished in the streets, in moments of conflict and in moments of creation. But how we talk about the movement, the stories we share, the narratives we create and the enemies and allies we identify, will determine whether the struggle becomes isolated and divided, or whether it continues to grow.



*Talib Williams inside Soledad State Prison in Monterey County, CA  
(Photo: SF Bay View)*

# **THEY CAME FOR US IN THE MORNING: WHAT PRISON OFFICIALS DON'T WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT THE RAID ON 200+ INCARCERATED BLACK PEOPLE AT SOLEDAD**

Talib Williams

**Emmett**Till, the Scottsboro Boys, the Central Park 5, and the list goes on. The ramifications of being falsely accused of a crime in America can be, and often have been, deadly for Black people.

Since the horrors of the European capitalist-economic enterprise known as the Atlantic Slave Trade, Black people – primarily Black men – have been lynched, burned alive, castrated and subjected to every other form of torture imaginable, as a result of being falsely accused of a crime. On the surface, these accusations seem to be rooted in fear and ignorance, but when investigated, are proven to be rooted in nothing other than a device on behalf of the dominant capitalist, white supremacist or patriarchal culture to maintain a position of power.

Not too long ago, we witnessed an attempt at jeopardizing the life of a Black man in Central Park. Just hours before George Floyd was murdered by four Minneapolis police officers, this man, who was birdwatching, politely asked a white woman to leash her dog. Her hostile call to police came not out of fear or ignorance, but was due to a boldness provided by her knowledge of how Black men in particular are viewed now and historically in this country.

Her attempt on the life of this Black man reveals the ever-present reality of what it means to be Black in America: to live in fear of being hunted. Media outlets immediately noted that things could and likely would have been drastically different had the incident not been caught on camera. Protesters and activists throughout the world held up and continue to hold up signs asking this very question about the latest string of televised crimes against Black people, “How many weren’t caught on camera?” But what about places where there are no cameras?

As an incarcerated person, I immediately began to reflect on my present reality and what those who are incarcerated know all too well: namely that what occurs in public throughout America has been taking place in the darkness of America’s prison system since its inception. “The prison is the place where state power is perhaps more forcefully experienced and publicly legitimized without being seen,” writes Dan Berger in “Captive Nation.”

“In other words, the prison is an example of state power at its most violent extreme, as well as an example of the way that power cloaks itself in invisibility,” he writes.

The lens through which we have been allowed to look into California’s prison system is the darkest opaque. Oftentimes, it takes a major incident for light to be shone on prisons: a riot, stabbing, major contraband bust, anything to

slant public opinion against the incarcerated.

But when something takes place that puts the integrity of correctional officers, and ultimately the entire system itself into question, silence abounds.

In the aftermath of the violent 3 a.m. raid on approximately 200 incarcerated Black people at Soledad State Prison on July 20 – if it wasn’t for the tireless effort of my wife, Tasha Williams, whose article in the San Francisco Bay View first alerted the world to what happened here at Soledad, as well as the tireless effort of countless wives, family members and loved ones sharing her article and the stories of their incarcerated friends and family who were brutalized, the world would, without doubt, still be in the dark about what happened to us.

Prison officials, on the other hand, waited an entire week before releasing a statement, and still it was only after and in response to receiving thousands of phone calls and emails from across the country culminating in protests in front of the prison that the spokesperson for Soledad State Prison released a statement to the public.

The statement denied the injuries, denied we were targeted because of our race, and most telling of all, that statement would not have been released had it not been for the continuous pressure from both inside and, more importantly, outside organizers against a system that thrives in silence. The prison’s silence was an attempt to “cloak itself in invisibility,” and yet their public statement was an attempt to do the same.

The following is a detailed first-hand account and contextualizing of what really happened in the early morning hours of July 20, 2020, at Soledad CTF (Correctional Training Facility), as well as the events that followed.

When I was violently snatched out of my sleep and slammed into the wall head first off the top bunk, I thought I was dreaming. I didn’t know what was going on; all I heard was yelling

and felt hands grabbing my arms and legs. With a knee in my back, my hands were zip-tied and I was forcefully snatched up by my throat and dragged out of the cell.

As soon as my eyes were able to adjust enough to glance to the right, I heard my cell mate, a 55-year-old man with degenerative disc disease in his spine, a chronic shoulder injury, and who is a diabetic, crying out that they were hurting his arm. I could see what I believe were two men wearing helmets, equipped with night vision, wearing fatigues, with black marks covering their faces entirely, doing to him what had been done to me.

I was carried out of the housing unit barefoot, wearing nothing but boxer briefs, forced to walk on a filthy floor down the central corridor, towards the dining hall. Along the way I could see and hear the same thing happening in every unit we passed, officers yelling “drag him” referring to people who had already been ripped violently from their sleep.

The atmosphere was filled with fear and uncertainty. To my surprise, when we turned into the dining hall, I saw close to 200 incarcerated people looking as shocked as I was. Shocked that it was so early in the morning, and at the fact that we were raided in a way never before seen at Soledad.

Never has a group of people who haven’t been involved in any disruptive activity – and who haven’t even been arrested for committing a crime – been raided the way we were. Even when someone commits a crime, they are not raided the way we were raided.

I have been in prison going on 19 years and I have never seen or heard of a group of people having been raided the way we were. But walking out of the dark housing unit, into the brightly lit corridor, I noticed patches across officers’ chests that told me this wasn’t a normal raid.

This was an inter-agency operation, a joint

team or special ops, security squad officers – SSU (Special Services Unit) and IGI (Institutional Gang Investigators) – from both Soledad CTF and neighboring Salinas Valley State Prison, as well as CDCR Sacramento, Office of Correctional Safety (OCS), and Special Services Unit Gang Intel Ops (SSU).

But even more than that, we were shocked at the fact that every single person sitting there in the dining hall was Black. Every age group from early 20s to late 70s. Nobody knew anything. Everyone was complaining about their injuries and the way we were raided.

Zip-tied, sitting on stainless steel stools, practically naked in a freezing kitchen during the worst pandemic to hit the world in over a hundred years, we soon realized something that was clearly not the concern of whoever was in charge of this operation: We were sitting next to each other without our masks. We immediately began to demand that we be provided face masks, but just like our demands for medical attention, we were ignored.

We sat there in anger, frustration, fear and, possibly more than anything else, confusion. No one could make sense of “why.” Why, after the prison’s Black population was congratulated and praised by the warden on institutional television for helping maintain a peaceful and positive program, were we being treated so inhumanely? But the longer we sat there, a troubling picture began to emerge; people spoke to being told by masked officers, “Black lives don’t matter.” Listening to everyone’s experiences, I thought to myself, “This can’t be happening!” at which point I heard an officer tell one person who was complaining about the fact that we were crammed next to each other without masks: “I hope you motherfuckers get COVID!”

The environment was hostile; an officer was in the guntower pointing his rifle at us, which led to an uproar and chant of “Black Lives Matter,”



which resulted in Black buddies being carried away. It was around this time that one brother from my building, Bernard Harris, told me my hands were purple – I was so cold that I couldn't feel that my hands had lost circulation due to the tightness of the zip-ties.

I immediately walked over to an officer named Brown and showed him my hands and he helped another officer, who looked horrified, cut off the zip-ties and replaced them with a looser pair. This was the only relief I experienced while sitting in that dining hall and I don't believe this could be separated from the fact that Brown was the only Black correctional officer present during our entire ordeal in that dining hall.

Brown is a regular correctional officer, not part of the Security Squad – Investigations Services Unit (ISU) and IGI – or the extraction team, which also included members of the Security Squad, as well as Sacramento's Special Services Unit Gang Intel Ops (SSU), all of whom were either white or of an ethnicity that possesses an inroad to whiteness.

While there are cries throughout the world of "defund police" and diversify the ranks of police forces, making them more "racially inclusive," what happened in the early morning hours of July 20, 2020, here at Soledad begs the question: How much more humanely would our Black bodies have been treated had there been more Black officers present?

When I returned to where I was seated, almost every other individual in that dining hall had to have their zip-ties cut off due to loss of circulation. We sat in that cold dining hall shivering for six hours, some of us zip-tied the entire time.

When we raised hell to use the bathroom, we were walked to the back of the kitchen to a secluded part of the prison one at a time, forced to walk barefoot in the officers spit on an already urine-covered bathroom floor. I was forced to

strip naked and when I complained, I was told, "You shouldn't have been Black."

Every time I tried to get a glimpse of an officer's name tag, there was none, only patches that read "CTR/SVSP" and "police." One officer, who came over to where we were waiting to go to the bathroom, however, was recognizable as Third Watch Building Officer Martinez, a known racist with multiple complaints against him for making racist comments and attempting to incite hostilities between the Black and Latinx populations.

It still remains unclear as to why he, a regular correctional officer, was there dressed as a member of the extraction team. Had he been one of the officers who violently extracted incarcerated people (while sleeping) from their beds in the very building he's responsible for managing five days a week? Is this why they covered their faces and wore no name tags?

But Martinez wanted to be seen. Like a sadistic predator circling back to see its victim, he couldn't help but show his face. However, his presence raises another question: During a pandemic that has forced CDCR officers and officials to take a 10 percent pay cut due to the governor's budget and be prohibited from working overtime, per their agreement, how is it that he was able to work overtime coming to work during non-work hours to play "Army"?

This wasn't just my experience alone. Every other Black person in that dining hall early that morning had a similar, and some an even worse experience. One person who was victimized – Erwin Harris, T25610 – was pulled violently off his top bunk, dragged out of his cell, zip-tied and pushed down a flight of stairs. He had to be taken to medical in a wheelchair.

Another person victimized, Eric Frazier, C62189, also had to be taken to medical in a wheelchair, having been dragged violently out of his cell despite telling his captors he had a pre-

existing back and hip injury. He was met with racial slurs while his seemingly lifeless body – according to one eye-witness who wishes to remain anonymous – was dragged to the corridor, when finally a wheelchair was requested.

Another person victimized, Ronald J. Smallwood, C15171, wrote, “At approximately 3:39 a.m., I was awakened by several individuals which I later found out were IGI, ISU and OCS. I was snatched out of my cell in my underwear and NOTHING else. I was then handcuffed with zip-ties and escorted to the chow hall. I sat there for five hours in zip-ties.”

Another person victimized, Derrick Porter, A88849, wrote: “On 7-20-20 at 3:30 am my cell door was pulled open while me and my cellie were asleep. We were attacked and assaulted by ISU Squad members. I was violently snatched off the top bunk by masked CDCR employees. I injured my arm, head, neck, and hip.

“Several officers jumped on my back and legs, while one put his knee on the side of my head. I was cuffed in, zip-tied and dragged out the cell. Not one ISU/OCS Task Unit officer had an identification name tag. I was put in dining hall #1 with no socks, no shoes, no shirt, and no mask.

“It was over 100 Black inmates, all zip-tied and in almost no clothes without masks. We were placed side-by-side and the wall was lined with CDCR employees who wore ISU black patches with CTF/SVSP logos and no name tags. These un-named officers were coughing and sneezing in the dining hall with us in it. SVSP staff came from a prison that has a COVID outbreak amongst staff and inmates. I was scared.”

Another person victimized, Marcelle Franklin, J65015, wrote: “At 3:30 am on 7-20-20, I was awakened by unknown individuals wearing helmets and face masks, later identified as CTF/SVSP ISU IGI and OCS. I was forcefully slammed to the ground, zip-tied, and dragged out

of my cell by multiple ISU officers, then placed in dining hall #1 without a mask, in nothing but my underwear for over five hours.”

CDCR officials can’t wrap their heads around the fact that incarcerated Black people throughout the entire state of California aren’t involved in any STG gang activity.

And lastly, in direct contradiction to what the warden said in an email the following day, attempting to distance himself from having knowledge of our condition, Marcus Harris, O09716, wrote: “On 7-20-20 at about 3:00 am, I was awakened by my cell door being slammed open and being physically snatched out of bed by some unknown persons. I was taken down to the Central Facility dining hall, handcuffed, with nothing on except underwear, and was made to sit on metal stools with no jacket, shoes, t-shirt, or mask for about five and a half hours.

“When I asked to see a doctor, I was told ‘No.’ After about five hours, the warden came in and started to give officers ‘high fives,’ telling them ‘Good job!’ I stood up and said, ‘How are you going to give them high fives and tell them good job for messing over a bunch of innocent Black people?’”

But it wasn’t over. We were then escorted out of the dining hall, still virtually naked, once again down the central corridor, still zip-tied, officers and free staff now clocking in to work looking at us as if we were animals. We were led one by one into what used to be the counselor’s office at the end of the west corridor, where we were interrogated by plain clothed OCS officers. When we get near the entrance, an OCS officer asked my name and CDCR number before handing the officer escorting me a packet that had my picture. In red letters was the word “Target,” below which was a paragraph of which I was only able to read the first line, which said, “His father is Milton Hayes, a validated associate of the Black Guerilla Family.”



*Correctional Training Facility (CTF) aka Soledad State Prison in Monterey County, California*

If you know me or have read my most recent blog post, “Crying Out From Soledad: An Open Letter to a Lawyer,” then you know that this is an issue about which I already have two pending lawsuits for retaliation, racial and religious discrimination against CDCR officers and officials for harassing me since 2011 for being in contact with my father.

They also single me out for my writing and journalism against this racist system, particularly my article in the San Francisco Bay View entitled, “Soledad prison guards refuse to wear safety masks amidst COVID-19 pandemic” for which I was raided less than a week after it was published, and more specifically my last book, “Soledad Uncensored,” the forward of which is being published as a series of articles, also in the San Francisco Bay View, entitled, “Soledad uncensored: Racism and the hyper-policing of Black bodies,” the entirety of which speaks directly against what was happening to us these early morning hours of July 20, 2020. Had

my writings contributed to my being included in this roundup?

I was led to a room where two OCS officers, one white, one Black, were waiting. They told me to face the wall while they cut off my zip-ties and honestly I thought they were going to beat me, or worse. I was so nervous my mouth instantly became dry.

But, frustrated that I was once again – based on what I was able to read from the description below my picture – being harassed because of my father’s past, I asked, “What the hell is going on? This is how you guys are getting down now!! Snatching people out of bed at 3:00 in the morning!! You have been harassing me since 2011 because of my father!”

That is when the white officer asked, “Why would you say we were harassing you because of your father?” “Because that’s what is says on the paper you just set aside,” I responded, noticing the look on his face change when the Black officer chimed in saying, “We’re not harassing

you. We just want to ask you some questions about Black Lives Matter.

“How do you feel about what happened to George Floyd? I know what the one cop did was wrong and he deserves to go to jail, but all cops aren’t bad,” he said. That’s ironic, considering the fact that here we were, having this conversation about police brutality rooted in racial biases, after approximately 200 Black men were violently snatched from their beds while sleeping – by police.

The premise upon which they sought to base the conversation was disrespectful. We had the whole “a few bad apples” conversation before I got tired and asked them, “So you mean to tell me y’all did all this to ask us about George Floyd and Black Lives Matter?!” when again the Black officer said, “Honestly, you have some tattoos on you that indicate you’re BGF!”

I shot back: “I’m not BGF, like I said when I first came in. Y’all have been harassing me since 2011 for being in contact with my father who, according to you, is a validated associate of the Black Guerilla Family. To me he’s simply my father who went to prison in ‘89 and had been out of my life until my sister found him still incarcerated in 2005.

“I have every letter he’s ever written me and not one of them is criminal in nature. They are letters from a father trying to mend a broken bond with his son. And about the tattoo you guys have been harassing me about since 2011, everything about it is Islamic.” I turned around to show them my back tattoo, which is a dragon with a huge crescent moon and star in the center of it flanked by the sword and staff of the prophet Muhammed, with a verse from the Qur’an over it in Arabic script.

“What about the dragon is Islamic?” they ask. At which point I give them a detailed explanation of a hadith mentioned in S.V. Mr. Ahmed Ali’s commentary to chapter 96, verse

6-7, of the Holy Qur’an about an enemy of the prophet Muhammed attempting to harm him while he (Muhammed) was praying, but turning back in fear because he saw that the prophet Muhammed was being protected by a dragon.

After explaining my tattoos for the 20th time, as well as explaining to them how racist it is to assume that a Black person in prison with a tattoo of a dragon – or a gorilla or snake, for that matter – is a member of a prison gang that has used such symbols – I further explained my point by saying that “if I was Asian and had a dragon tattoo it wouldn’t be an issue!”

They replied, “But you’re not!” and when I asked affirmatively, “So it’s because I’m Black?” they, to my surprise said, “Yes.” After they “apologized” regarding the misunderstanding of my tattoo, saying, “We hope you can get that cleared up about your tattoo,” they told me I could go.

When I returned to my cell, still confused as to why we were kidnapped in the middle of the night just to be questioned about Black Lives Matter, George Floyd, and a prison “gang” from the ‘70s, I was shocked even further by the way they trashed the cell. Everything was thrown all over the place.

My cellmate, who had returned to the cell before me, was busy separating his remaining property from mine when I noticed that every single piece of paperwork, writing paper, envelopes, every letter, picture, photo album, phone book and book was gone. In the midst of my remaining property was a “Security Squad Receipt” that said the only thing taken was “paperwork.”

Later that morning, when everyone was let out of their cells to set up like we do every morning for “cell reading,” everyone was shocked that we weren’t on “scheduled program,” which is the normal protocol when there is a threat, especially one that necessitates a raid. The first

step of a “modified program” due to a threat is for the officers to conduct a “threat assessment” by interviewing everyone in the prison one by one, voluntarily.

The fact that they weren’t conducting a threat assessment didn’t make sense. Obviously, something wasn’t right. In the process of cleaning up and preparing for breakfast, someone found paper tags presumed to be place markers used during the raid. One had the words “property team,” “tag 1, receipts” and “Charlie” printed over a watermark on the SSU seal. The other has the words, “Charlie wing” which is the unit where the tags were found, as well as the unit I’m housed in.

At the top of this particular tag, however, were words that would explain everything: “Operation Akili.” The name of this operation was a Swahili word that means “intelligence,” which comes from the Arabic word “Agli,” having the same meaning. They were on a fishing expedition, a dragnet – intelligence gathering – which explains why the only thing they took was paperwork, letters, books, pictures and phone books.

There was no threat. Not only did the name of their operation indicate that there was no threat, but the raid itself turned up no weapons, no notes referring to any type of threat or STG (Security Threat Group, the new term for “gang”) activity. The reality is, there has been no Black STG activity here at Soledad whatsoever. In fact, ask CDCR and Soledad CTF officials to release a report stating how many weapons Black incarcerated people have been found in possession of and how many STG related incidents in the last 10 years have Black incarcerated people been involved in, and I guarantee the answer will shock you.

I was able to obtain every single Program Status Report (PSR) from 2017 to 2020 and not one single report refers to a single STG activity

involving the population of incarcerated Black people, not even in the days surrounding the raid. But herein lies the reason why: CDCR officials can’t wrap their heads around the fact that incarcerated Black people throughout the entire state of California aren’t involved in any STG gang activity.

As I’ve been highlighting in my writing these past couple of years, the criminal mentality of old that most people have been conditioned to associate with prison does not exist. Incarcerated people throughout California realize that the days of languishing in prison until one is useless and unable to contribute to society are over.

It is incarcerated people who promote non-violence that make prisons obsolete.

Even people who entered the prison system as gang members no longer glorify gang culture or the culture of violence. Not only are “self-help” groups being created by incarcerated people themselves to challenge ideas of toxic masculinity and the culture of violence, such as “success stories,” which was recognized by the California Legislature, but laws are being passed that have taken into consideration the work that we are in here doing, which gives incarcerated people hope like we’ve never had before.

With the passing of Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 186, introduced by Assemblymember Kamlager, “the Legislature recognizes the need for statutory changes to end extreme sentencing,” which disproportionately subjects Black people.

It says, “The Black community is disproportionately subjected to extreme sentences, representing less than 15 percent of the national population, but comprising 48.3 percent of people serving life sentences, 55 percent of people serving virtual life sentences, and 56.4 percent of people serving life sentences without the possibility of parole” and that “research has shown that long sentences do not



deter future crimes and that there is no reliable evidence showing that any deterrent effect is “sufficiently large to justify the cost of long prison sentences ...

“In 2018, only 2.9 percent of people serving life sentences were released and only 0.3 percent of people serving third-strike were released, and ... out of 988 people convicted of murder who were released from California prisons over a 20-year period, only 1 percent were arrested for new crimes. None of the 988 people were rearrested for murder and none of them went back to prison over the 20-year period examined.”

Understanding this, incarcerated people know that it is counter-productive to commit acts that justify one’s incarceration. Not only are incarcerated people politically aware of the effects of violence, but thanks to Black resistance authors such as bell hooks, we are aware of the effects of violence in a more holistic way to where non-violence becomes a lifestyle as well as a rock to be used against a system that bases its very existence on our disfunction. It is incarcerated people who promote non-violence that make prisons obsolete.

CDCR officials are aware of this as well. Budgets are already being cut. Prisons are being scheduled to shut down, and employees of these institutions are going to have to find new jobs. However, a certain segment of CDCR have become so accustomed to this sadistic enterprise that they cannot imagine a world without it. They will go to imperceivable lengths to ensure its continued existence.

Since they can no longer use the “violent criminal” as a justification, they have resorted to criminalizing the very existence of incarcerated people. This becomes even more troubling when racism enters into the equation. We know the effects of systemic racism in the police departments and judicial systems, but what many people aren’t aware of, by design, are

the effects of systemic racism inside the prison system. Guns don’t exist in prison (except in strategically placed guntowers) so you aren’t going to have “officer involved shootings” of unarmed Black and Latinx people.

Prison is a different kind of monster; the weapon of choice in prison is and always has been “documentation.” Michael Foucault wrote in his famous “Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prisons,” “It must be possible to hold the prisoner under permanent observation; every report that can be made about him must be recorded and compared.”

He continues, “No detail is unimportant, but not so much for the meaning that it conceals within it as for the hold it provides for the power that wishes to seize it.” Departments of “Corrections” aren’t concerned with the accuracy of the information about you so much as they are concerned with how they can use that information to control every aspect of your existence in order to maintain their position of dominance. Their sole concern is to create, on paper, a perpetual criminal, thereby justifying the perpetual existence of prison.

Just two days after the raid, we received our property back. Well, almost all of it. Almost everyone who was raided got a receipt notifying them of certain items not returned “pending investigation.” Guess what these items were? Books, newspapers, pictures and quotes from Black historical figures. DOCUMENTATION. They kept my book “Soledad Uncensored,” quotes from George Jackson used for research on my book, a picture of Dr. Angela Davis and Jonathon Jackson protesting in front of Soledad in the ‘70s – also used for my book – and a letter to a journalist about COVID-19 and anti-Black racism in prison.

Their reason for keeping these items, written on the receipt, was: “The aforementioned items will be retained for further investigation into

your suspected involvement with the Black Guerilla Family (BGF) Security Threat Group-1 (STG-1)." Everyone else who received a receipt had had the same exact words written on it. Items taken from them include newspaper articles about George Jackson, pictures of the San Quentin 6, and even sheets of paper with book titles written on them: "Blood in My Eye," "The Spook Who Sat By the Door."

This is what we're dealing with, and it can't be described as anything other than racist. Every facet of existence of incarcerated people is criminalized, especially if you're Black. Everything from the books we read to our hairstyles are criminalized.

Hairstyles aren't seen as an attempt to express our individuality in an environment whose intent is to strip us of anything unique, or that points to our being individuals in any way. Instead, our hairstyles are seen by certain elements within CDCR as expressions of "gang culture," despite the fact that in the history of American street gangs, there has never been a single hairstyle associated with an expression as one's affiliation. Even still, young Black men are harassed and even chased down to be given "verbal warnings" for having designs shaved into their heads.

Don't get "caught" with a book by Angela Davis, Marcus Garvey or Malcom X, and you damn sure better not get "caught" with a book by George Jackson – all of which aren't on any official list of prohibited books and are all allowed into the prison through an order from Amazon Prime, or any other bookseller. But once an officer sees you with one, you will – if you're Black – immediately be under investigation as a member of the Black Guerilla Family, an organization formed in the '70s in prison that today, in 2020, is virtually nonexistent, except in the minds of correctional officers intent on living in the past.

So what you end up with is young Black men who are afraid to study their history for fear of being labeled, meanwhile those who muster up the courage – being dedicated and committed to non-violence – are seeking to understand the pitfalls of the past in order to contribute to a society they once took part in destroying. By preventing others from treading the course of violence, through knowledge, they are criminalized.

Before recent events, I thought this targeting was simply because correctional officers didn't understand Black culture, but like the white lady in Central Park, correctional officers aren't acting out of ignorance, but in fact are tapping into the very anti-Black racist ideas that underpin American society.

They know we are not members of the Black Guerilla Family, but they also know that, in a society so deeply connected to racist ideas concerning prison, that incarcerated Black men are seen as perpetually criminal, and thus labeling us as BGF places a stigma on us that will last throughout the duration of our incarceration, becoming a barrier in the way of our release. These are the lengths they will go to.

Two days after we received our property, people began to receive "validation packets," a process to becoming validated by CDCR as a member or associate of a Security Threat Group. It was only after this point that the spokesperson for Soledad CTR released his statement to the public that the people who were raided were members of a Security Threat Group. They were trying to cover their asses.

People were being labeled everything from "chief financial officer for BGF" to "BGF foot soldier." I told a friend of mine, "Watch these fools say I have something to do with education," when lo and behold! That same day I received my validation packet saying that I was "the Minister of Education for BGF." But that was only the

beginning.

They said the pictures of George Jackson on my Instagram page managed by my family to advertise my writings, was “BGF propaganda.” They even went so far as saying about my crescent moon and star tattoo: “It (the star) contains five outer-pointed and five inner-pointed, with each point representing one point of the 10-point party platform of the Black Panther Party (BPP), which is part of the BGF constitution.”

But if you thought it couldn’t get worse, they had the nerve to say that the Arabic verse from the Qur’an (79:14) on my back “translated into English as ‘Assaulter, attacker with alertness.’” I couldn’t believe what I was reading. The officer who wrote it was B. Barron.

He wrote: “While conducting photographs of his tattoos (on 4-27-20) specifically on Williams upper back above and below the black dragon, I discovered Arabic writing. I was unable to translate the Arabic writing, therefore, I questioned Williams on the meaning of the tattoos. Williams became defensive and stated, ‘You can figure that out. Do your job.’”

Based on my training and experience, I know Williams becoming defensive about his tattoos means they are indicative of gang membership. Upon discovering the Arabic writing, I contacted the OCS, Correctional Intelligence Task Force (CITF) and Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) Terrorism Task Forces (CT2) to translate the Arabic writing discovered on Williams’ tattoos.

“Upon receiving the translation from OCS, the Arabic writing translated to English as ‘Assaulter, attacker with alertness’ and ‘Tajdeed.’ This Arabic writing is significant to the BGF also meaning he will conduct assaults on behalf of the BGF. The Arabic writing is also indicative to the membership of the Radical Islamic Group ‘Tajdeed UL-Islam (TUI).’”

I couldn’t believe what I was reading.

“Tajdid,” which is on my lower back, is a concept in Islam that refers to returning back to the original humanistic teachings of Islam, popularly known as Surism. To associate such a term with “radicalism” is disrespectful.

They gave me 72 hours to respond to the allegations in writing, and since they were trying to validate me as a member of BGF, that’s what I focused on, saving everything else for the lawsuit. What I wrote in response to the allegations mentioned above (in part) was: “I find it strange that B. Barron only pointed out the star, attempting to link it with BGF via the Black Panther Party. When pictures were taken of my back tattoo between 2015-2019, First Lt. Officer Pearson (?) immediately recognized the crescent moon and star.

“B. Barron’s failure to recognize the crescent moon shows that he had his mind set on associating me with BGF. When I said to B. Barron, concerning the Arabic writing on my back, ‘You can figure it out. Do your job.’ I said that out of frustration, having already explained my tattoos at least five times before, and not because B. Barron said, “They are indicative of gang membership.”

The Arabic writing across my back is Verse 14 of chapter 79 of the Holy Qur’an that translates into English as, “Then behold they will be upon a wide expanse.” Which is a reference to a scene on the Day of Judgment when humanity will be standing “upon a wide expanse” of earth, awaiting God’s judgment.

Whoever was responsible for the OCS Correctional Intelligence’s Task Force (CITF) needs to be re-trained. B. Barron stated that he “contacted the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Terrorism Task Force (CT-2) to translate the Arabic writing” but only used “the translation from OCS,” which according to them “translated to English as ‘Assaulter, attacker with alertness.’” According to B. Barron,

“This Arabic writing is significant to the BGF also meaning he will conduct assaults on behalf of BGF.”

The reason B. Barron omitted the translation from the FBI is because they told him it was a verse from the Qur'an, and therefore didn't fit his narrative, just like the huge crescent moon and star didn't fit his narrative, so he omitted mentioning the moon. This is giving him the benefit of doubt.

What I believe is that B. Barron never sent a picture of my tattoo to the OCS or the FBI, but that he himself “translated” the Arabic, and therefore must be investigated for falsifying documents, because there is no way that an expert would have come up with that translation. This is what racism looks like inside Soledad State Prison. You will be raided in the middle

of the night and assaulted by officers, and when media attention is placed on the officers' actions, those same officers will falsify documents in order to cover their asses.

And because we live in a society where incarcerated people are viewed as perpetually criminal, who knows how far into the future, and to what lengths, officers will carry these allegations. Will our families be targeted next?

#BLACKINCARCERATEDLIVESMATTER  
#FREETHEMALL  
#FREETALIB

Send our brother some love and light: Talib Williams, V69247, CTF CW-121, P.O. Box 689, Soledad CA 93960. And visit his website, [www.talibthestudent.com](http://www.talibthestudent.com).

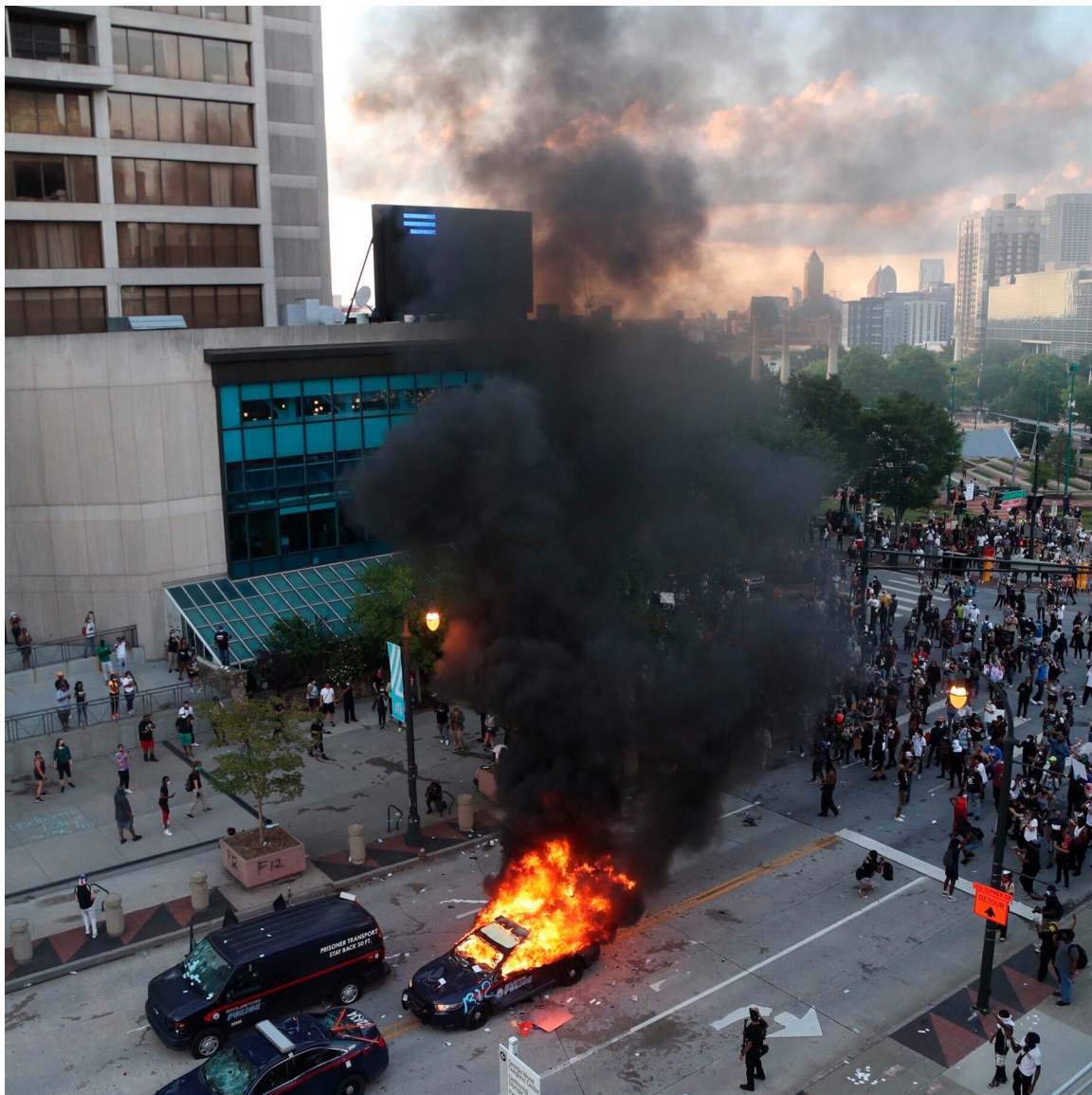






## **Part 2.**

# **Belligerent Identities and other Theories on Insurgency**



*Police car burned by protestors in Atlanta, GA. May 29, 2020  
(Photo: Alyssa Pointer)*

# HOW IT MIGHT SHOULD BE DONE

Idris Robinson

*The following is a transcript of a talk delivered in Seattle on July 20, 2020, lightly-edited by the author for readability. A video recording produced by Red May is available on YouTube.*

I want to begin with a shout-out to what happened here last night, and to the working class of the city of Seattle, to the rebels of the city of Seattle: I really liked what I saw, that's why I'm here, you know, to feel that vibe. I would also like to send my solidarity to comrades in Greece. It was they who allowed me to experience insurrection for the first time in 2008. The lessons I've learned and the experiences I had there have been so valuable this time around, even though we are in a much different social context. Moreover, a comrade was recently killed at the hands of the police there. To the fallen comrade, Vasillis Maggos, I want to say: rest in power.

My title demands a little bit of explanation. It is a reference to Chernyshevsky [1], and to

the novel he wrote from inside a Czarist prison. Lenin borrowed the title for his 1902 pamphlet, *What Is to Be Done?* [2], which provides answers to what he calls “the burning questions of our movement”: what does it mean to constitute a vanguard party? how do we spread consciousness from this vanguard party to the working class? how do we move beyond strikes to a full-on revolutionary political struggle?, etc. Later, in 2001, a text entitled “How It Is to Be Done” appeared in the journal of the French collective *Tiqqun*. [3] Rather than stating what our goals or objectives should be, *Tiqqun* sought to shift our focus to the means and the techniques of struggle. Instead of thinking about ends, they thought about the means that we should employ. My aim here is far less ambitious. As for the grammatical construction, “might should”, from the southern dialect—I tried to Blackify the title a little bit. But it’s also serious, because these are in fact tentative theses and proposals: I’m perfectly okay with being completely wrong about every single thing I put forward today, just so long as it creates a further deeper discussion on strategy. What I really want to do is open up this discussion, and I want to leave it, for people to engage with it as they want to, and to push it further. At the same time, I want the dialogue to be honest. There’s a kind of prevailing posture of cynicism, nihilism, and democratic moralism that holds back insurrection. And I think now is the time: we are experiencing an uprising on a scale that many of us have never lived through. Even if we compare present events to Greece, this thing has gone much further. There are far more martyrs in this struggle than there ever were in the Greek uprising. The time has arrived for strategic thought and reflection.

It’s of course weird to find myself saying this in America, the most anti-counter revolutionary place on the globe. But we must reorient ourselves, and take these questions seriously.

The stakes have been raised to the next level, they’re extremely high now. It’s time for us to think seriously about them.

## **1. A MILITANT NATIONWIDE UPRISING DID IN FACT OCCUR. THE PROGRESSIVE WING OF THE COUNTERINSURGENCY SEEKS THE DENIAL AND DISARTICULATION OF THIS EVENT.**

The obvious is not always so obvious.

We all saw it. We all saw what happened after the murder of George Floyd. What occurred was an extremely violent and destructive rebellion. It was a phenomenon the likes of which we have not seen in America in 40 or 50 years. Very few of us have experienced anything of this magnitude: a precinct was immediately torched in Minneapolis, after which entire cities went up in flames—New York, Atlanta, Oakland, Seattle. Comparisons were quickly made with the riots after Martin Luther King’s assassination. However, I think that we’ve gone further in this case, that 2020 went harder than 1968, and we’re not even done yet.

Despite all of this, the reformers have had the audacity to claim that all of this never actually happened. They are trying to make the burning cop cars disappear, to extinguish from memory the police stations on fire, as if it didn’t happen. Again and again, I hear the same script: someone comes on the news, a political activist gives a talk, and we hear them say something like, “the protests were peaceful and non-violent, they stayed within the bounds of law and order.” No: cops being shot at in St. Louis is not within the bounds of law and order. They’re doing their best to make the event disappear. One has to wonder what planet they are on that a torched police station appears within the bounds of civility.

This delusion is something that we need

to think about. Ultimately, it's more than a delusion. It unites veritably all the progressive liberals who chatter on about what's been going on over the past summer. From the Biden democrats to virtually all of the mainstream media not affiliated with Fox News, to the Black Lives Matter people, the agenda pushed by all these groups is the claim that the insurrection did not take place. I even read a recent study by some sort of consulting firm that sought to prove through quantitative means that there was a very civil nature to the protests. [4]

The fact is, whatever data or graphs they draw up, nothing will erase the fact that police cars were on fire in dozens of American cities. So why do liberals feel the need to jump through such incredible hoops in order to erase this insurrection or this uprising? Why is it that the most violent wings of law and order—e.g., Attorney General William Barr—are today the only audible voices willing to acknowledge that the uprising occurred? We need to think this through.

What is at issue is more than just a momentary lapse of sanity: it is a strategy of denial, a counterinsurgent strategy of reform par excellence.

Unconsciously, liberals do recognize that an insurrection occurred. They can't ignore the shattered glass that occurred in the streets of Seattle yesterday. But what they want is to downplay the significance of these events that mean so much to us, and that we are continually trying to push forward. They want to reassert and reaffirm them, but in a different direction. Ultimately, what they want is to block the possibilities that the revolt has opened up, to dissuade us from going further in this uprising. As with all democratic liberal reformists, what they're trying to do is exploit the outburst in order to make it so that things change, but only just a little—which is to say, not at all.

There's a moral component to this as well, a deep ethical problem. This wing of the counterinsurgency is just one more way that those in line with the system have found to manage and to exploit Black death. It must be recalled (and I will return to this below) that there are scores of young Black children who lost their lives in the uprising, and that activists, 'woke' journalists, progressive politicians of all stripes, and even so-called BLM activists are profiting off their death. This is a continuous narrative in American society, and it will not stop now unless we do something about it.

By denying the event, they seek to obscure the revolutionary truth that was ushered in through the streets. They want to extinguish the present that we brought about. They want to sap our energy while they propose superficial palliative adjustments to preserve the system. The history of America is the history of attempts to reform race relations. If they haven't gotten it right by now, they never will.

Whatever they do, whatever slight changes they make, there will always remain an insatiable drive to brutalize and kill Black people. Anyone who profits off this change is complicit in that murder. If you block the revolutionary trajectory of the rebellion, you have blood on your hands. Anyone who remains complicit with the system is the enemy, tout court.

By contrast, the Right has adopted the opposite approach to the event. Besides us revolutionaries, they are the only voices today that acknowledge that the rebellion occurred. There's an illuminating honesty to what William Barr says. Think of it this way: before he can forcefully smash and eventually suppress an insurrection, he must first acknowledge that one did, in fact, occur. In this way, there's an honesty to Trump's words. Trump and his entire Fox News crowd, all those who are calling for law and order, have no choice but to acknowledge



the existence of the uprising, precisely because they want to crush it. Just today, Trump declared on the news that he intends to send federal stormtroopers not only to Portland but to New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. [5] To justify such a choice, he must acknowledge that the uprising did in fact happen. These are the two sides into which our opponents may be divided, the Janus face of the State we confront today.

What is more, the rebellion shows the liberals what it means to defund the police halfway, instead of abolishing and outright destroying them. If anyone thinks it suffices to undertake a series of small measures and quick fixes, or that they can re[form] and preserve the police as a force while simply shrinking it—well, the result is what is happening right now in Portland. Let that be an example to liberals. On the other hand, those who recognize that a change really did occur, and who now seek to stomp it out are typically more aligned with fascist trajectories and politics, since they are typically the same people who feel the need to dream up and defend a sort of immutable, eternal, and transcendental idea of law, order, and white supremacy. Whatever deviates from the ideal, this fascist side of order will seek to annihilate. For this reason, it is compelled to refuse those same reforms that the liberals attempt to push through. For instance, this is why Trump is so upset about changing the names of military bases. The issue itself doesn't actually matter, but the sort of power he represents cannot stand such changes, and seeks instead to crush and flatten the event itself in its tracks.

There's only one way to deal with this fascist wing of the state: they operate with violence, and we return with violence that's more powerful. However, as concerns the other, more reformist side that aims to deny the event in order to incorporate it into their own objectives, we need to be a little bit sharper in how we handle them.

We need to be deceptive, like Machiavelli's fox. Honesty isn't their mode of operating. They have always sought to deny what lies right before our eyes. Deception and subversion is how we are going to have to play them: we need to deceive them twice over.

When it comes to these two sides of state, I do not wish to claim that either one is any more nefarious than the other, but simply that these are the two sides that we have to contend with, and ultimately to defeat.

## **2. WHILE SPEARHEADED BY A BLACK AVANT-GARDE, THIS LARGELY MULTI-ETHNIC REBELLION MANAGED TO SPONTANEOUSLY OVERCOME CODIFIED RACIAL DIVISIONS. THE CONTAINMENT OF THE REVOLT AIMS AT REINSTATING THESE RIGID LINES OF SEPARATION AND POLICING THEIR BOUNDARIES.**

To begin with, it must be said that former African slaves and their ancestors have been the avant-garde of everything in this country. There's no culture in America, in this American wasteland, without us. There's no classical music; there's jazz, and that was invented by us. And besides that, America has nothing to offer the world and it never has.

However, I used the term avant-garde in a more specific sense. There were no leaders. We were not leaders of the revolt. We were the avant-garde who spearheaded it, we set it off, we initiated it. What ensued was a wildly multi-ethnic uprising, and the reformists will do everything in their power to make it so that this truth is erased. If you were out on the streets, you know you saw people of all different kinds. Different bodies, different shapes, different genders, manifested themselves in the streets together.

There's a lot of talk about how to end racism, especially within corporate and academic circles. We saw how to end racism in the streets the first weeks after George Floyd was murdered.

It was only after the uprising began to slow down and exhaust itself that the gravediggers and vampires of the revolution began to reinstate racial lines and impose a new order on the uprising. The most subtle version of this comes from the activists themselves. Our worst enemies are always closest to us. You've all been in these marches, these ridiculous marches, where it's, "white people to the front, Black people to the center"—this is just another way of reimposing these lines in a more sophisticated way. What we should be aiming for is what we saw in the first days, when these very boundaries began to dissolve.

The most devastating example of how the racial lines and boundaries are reimposed comes from the example of Rayshard Brooks' long-time partner, Natalie White, who offers the most blatant example of this racial policing seen so far. White was called out by so-called "woke" Twitter activists for her involvement in the protests in Atlanta over her dead partner. Eventually, they implicated her in the burning of the Wendy's where Rayshard was killed. It is up to us to never reinforce these sort of bourgeois constructs of guilt or innocence. Whether she had a hand in the destruction or not, I don't judge her either way. That is not up to us, we stand in solidarity no matter what. But I do hold accountable, I do place blame on the wanna be do-gooders, these "woke" Twitter activists who implicated her in what occurred. I lay the blame solely on those activists, and Rayshard Brooks lays the blame on them from the grave.

Order neatly defines collections of people — these are the prerogatives of prison guards, of the police. We should remember the example of John Brown, who was often criticized by his so-called

allies and friends for relating to Black people in a way that they deemed unacceptable. If you saw the way John Brown related to Black people in his time, you might think he was being criticized for relating to Black people as human beings. Every time we cross over those racial boundaries and meet each other as human beings, this is when we will be criticized, especially by the most advanced parts of the counterinsurgency. John Brown was heavily criticized for his advocacy of militant tactics, and Frederick Douglass was among his most vocal critics of his advocacy for insurrection. Douglass would come around later, but history would prove Brown right: the only way to abolish slavery is through violent insurrection. History has now redeemed him to some extent. But what I want us to think about is this: if John Brown was alive today, what would he be like? How would he behave? John Brown would be in jail alongside Natalie White for crossing over those boundaries.

### **3. BY AVOIDING THE MORBID LIBIDINAL CORE OF WHITE SUPREMACY, IDENTITY POLITICS, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND SOCIAL PRIVILEGE DISCOURSE COMPRISE THE MOST SOPHISTICATED SECTOR OF THIS POLICE APPARATUS.**

We've all come in contact with it at some point, particularly if we have been involved in politics for some time. We all know that identity politics, this talk about "white privilege" and what people call "intersectionality"—all it does is reinforce the racial lines that we're trying to overcome. If it ever had any use or goal, the uprising has superseded it at this point. Let me work through these ideas one by one.

Privilege: I think we all know, or we can all admit, or we should admit, that privilege has become a purely psychological concept. There's a long history to the notion of white privilege.

It dates back to W.E.B. Du Bois, to Theodore Allen, to Noel Ignatiev, to Harry Haywood. For each of these authors, what was in question was a theoretical construct whose aim was to incite white workers to strike alongside Black workers. Somehow in the twists and turns that are American politics, the notion became psychological, a way to make white people feel good about their guilt. If you look at, for instance, Peggy McIntosh's definitive text on white privilege, she talks about the privilege of being able to chew with your mouth closed. I don't give a fuck about chewing with my mouth closed. [6]

As for intersectionality: I did a talk at Red May so I won't go into this too deeply here, but as John Clegg and I tried to show, the presuppositions that intersectionality holds are becoming empirically false. [7] What the data is beginning to show is that, for instance, there are more Black women prison guards than there are those going into prison. This doesn't discredit the struggle and plight of Black women, but as a construct, intersectionality is showing its limits. In fact, there are more white women being incarcerated today than Black women, oddly enough. As for Black men, we all know they just sit in jail and stay in jail.

Whatever intersectionality once wanted to do is no longer feasible or viable as a guide for us. In my talk with Red May, I suggest that we get back to the roots of Black feminism. We need categories that understand the Black feminist struggle beyond the oppression that the system inflicts upon them. I cited Toni Cade Bambara's book called "The Black Woman" (1970), in her excellent preface, she refuses to define what a "Black woman" is. She does not say that a Black woman is the intersection of two oppressions;

she does not say that Black women are in the margins of two different systems of hierarchy.

What she argues, rather, is that Black women are an open possibility to be further understood through their revolutionary activity. In place of intersectionality as a discourse of systemic oppression, what we need to do is to bring back the idea of Black feminism as a discourse of struggle.

Finally, by opening up this definition of what Black women are and who they are, what Toni Cade Bambara was saying is that Black women cannot be tied down by any static identity imposed upon them. Of course they are something more. And if we look at the history of Black folks in this country, we're always something more than what has been hoisted upon us.

Identity politics, intersectionality, and social privilege discourse: all are modalities of the police.

What's more, and above all, is that each of these discourses ignore the morbid and terrifying libidinal politics that undergirds race in this country. It took someone as courageous as James Baldwin to say this, and everyone is still afraid to repeat it. If you read his phenomenal short story, "Going to Meet the Man," [8] you can see the dynamics of racism in this country acutely. To briefly summarize the story: it starts in the bedroom of a white heterosexual couple. The white man is struggling with impotence. How does he get over his impotence? He remembers back to a time as a child where he was brought to a lynching. At that lynching the corpse was not only mutilated, it was sexually mutilated, and he was given the genitalia. Once he remembers being handed the genitalia, he is able to become erect.

This is deep stuff. No one likes talking about it. But this is the core of racism that we need to reach. What's more, I think no one wants to touch this part of the race problem because we are all implicated in it. It is obvious that white liberals get off on videos of Black murder. It is even more obvious that there are Black liberals who are more than happy to sell these videos of Black death for their own careerist goals. So long as we fail to take into account these libidinal drives within racism, we will not be able to explain how and why Ahmaud Arbery was killed. It had nothing to do with the police. It had to do with what is driving American society as such.

**4. THE INSURGENCY CANNOT BE CONFINED WITHIN ANY WELL-CIRCUMSCRIBED SOCIOLOGICAL CATEGORY. BY NECESSARILY EXCEEDING ALL CLASSIFICATION, IT IS AN EXCLUDED REMNANT DETACHING ITSELF FROM ALL THAT BINDS TOGETHER THE AMERICAN WASTELAND. CONSEQUENTLY, THIS COMBATANT FORMATION CAN ONLY BE DEFINED IN TERMS OF ITS MOVEMENT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT, AS THAT WHICH EMERGED DURING THE FIRST WEEKS OF THE REVOLT AND WHICH WILL DISSOLVE ITSELF UPON THE FULL COMPLETION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PROJECT.**

As I said earlier, every conceivable kind of person participated in the revolt. This can be confirmed by anyone who participated in the revolt itself. There is no category that can sum up all of who was there. The best we can say is that what we saw was the inclusively-excluded, or the part of America that has no part in it, and that wants nothing to do with this place. Such a

formation can only be grasped by how it is moving, outside and against the current state of things, that can only be traced by way of its trajectory: against the state and capital, against American society. What is now up to us is to deepen and strengthen this spontaneous organization, so that we come up with something together that is even more terrible, even more powerful, than what we saw last night. Something that splits American society in half.

**5. THE SO-CALLED BLACK LEADERSHIP, THEREFORE, CANNOT AND DOES NOT EXIST. IT IS A CHIMERA TO BE FOUND EXCLUSIVELY IN THE WHITE LIBERAL IMAGINATION.**

You hear it everywhere. I've heard it from every city, every friend who texted me. If I called a friend and said, "Hey, what happened in NOLA?" or "What happened in Chicago?" If there were riots, if people got busy, there was no mention of a Black leadership. If things stopped, if things were stultified, all we heard about was a Black leadership.

The thing is, I have never in my life actually seen a Black leader. Why? Because they don't exist. If there are Black leaders, they're dead like Martin and Malcolm. If you're worth your salt, you will be killed. If there are Black leaders, they are in jail with Mumia and with Sundiata. If there are Black leaders, they are on the run with Assata.

There is only one category of people who speak of Black leaders, and we know them as white liberals. The Black leadership is nothing other than a figment and hallucination that exists solely in the imagination of the white liberal's mind. The odd thing about it is that somehow white liberals have more contact with

Black leaders than I have ever come across in my entire life. It is as if a channel extends from the Black leadership directly into their head.

There have been reasons proposed as to why the classical formation of Black leadership no longer exists. One argument, which can be derived from many of the new sociological studies (there was a big report about this in the New York Times as well), asserts that to develop a firm hegemonic leadership of the sort we saw in the past, typically requires a substantial middle class. But if you look at the data from the past 40 years, the Black middle class has been under constant threat. Hopefully it stays like that, honestly. But it is very hard to define what exactly the Black middle class is. If you do say there is this well-defined group, and if you're able to circumscribe this well-defined group, they typically exist within the white community. Just to speak a little bit more personally from my experience in New York, I am hard pressed to think of ever meeting a Black middle-class person growing up, or of ever even hearing their rhetoric and their nonsense. But it's not really a thing anymore.

Why does the white liberal need to hallucinate and invent a Black leadership for him or herself? Ultimately, it is because whiteness loves property. Property enjoys a special prestige in American life, it has a special kind of sanctity. We always get these calls for the Black leadership from white liberals whenever the windows start to crack. There is a very important reason that property has this particular kind of sanctity in America, as many historians are starting to confirm and argue. [9] For most of its history, the most important property in America was human property, shackled and chained. We need to weaponize this argument, and say that whenever property is protected, it is protected for white supremacist ends. If property is truly the pursuit

of happiness, in that trifecta of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the existence of that happiness and property is premised upon the negation of Black life and the negation of Black liberty. So the protection of property is something that we need to attack explicitly.

## **6. THE CURRENT CRISIS DERIVES FROM A CONTRADICTION THAT PROCEEDS FROM THE TWO JANUS-FACED SIDES OF POST-COLD WAR AMERICAN GOVERNANCE: AN INCONSISTENCY BETWEEN THE DEMANDS OF THE SOVEREIGN IMPERIAL STATE AND GLOBALIZED BIOPOLITICAL SECURITY. AS A RESULT, THE METROPOLITAN CENTER HAS BEGUN TO EXPERIENCE THE SORT OF CHAOS AND THE INSTABILITY THAT IT HAS CLASSICALLY SEWN WITHIN THE COLONIAL PERIPHERY.**

This dynamic captures the situation that we are living in today, and which we have been experiencing acutely over the past few months. On the one side, we have state sovereignty, the classical notion of the state. Following Schmitt, but most importantly following Agamben, the paradoxical foundation of the state proves to be important to the way it operates. In order to define the state, the state must employ extra-legal and extra-judicial measures in order to found itself. Every time the state founds itself, it must go outside the law that it seeks to create. What has occurred classically, and we have a lot of historical examples of this in America, is that whenever there's a crisis, the state imposes some sort of state of exception in order to create the order that it needs to reassert itself.

As we saw, for example, in the American Civil War, in the two Red Scares, and most recently



in the War on Terror, the executive branch of the government has continually mobilized itself beyond its formal legal parameters and confines. We see this today especially with Trump. Trump is using and abusing his executive powers, but it is better to say that he is using them in the way that they were set out to be used. What was originally the province of the legislative branch has now been taken over by Trump himself.

This component of the U.S. asserting itself has also shown itself in its foreign wars. We need to keep in mind, and I will come back to this, that—and for some reason this fact has been downplayed in the past 20 or 30 years—America is the one imperial power in the globe, and it serves itself aggressively around the world. After the collapse of the [Soviet Union] and the Cold War, we have seen the United States become the police officer, or the storm trooper, of the entire Earth. This is one side of governance.

It is important to contrast this with another form of governance, which is typically called biopolitical discipline, or biopolitical security. The latter differs from the enforcement of the law carried out by the classic state. Rather, it names the management of lives. If the state kills, biopolitics is concerned with the protection of those lives—for its own ends, of course.

The most recent regime of biopolitical control is what is known as “security”. What “security” does is it allows an event to happen, so as to then manage that event. These events are varied. They can be something like pandemics, like the COVID-19 pandemic we’re going through today; these could be famines, or disasters like Katrina; and they could also be insurrections like the one we are hopefully fomenting right now. What the state does in these instances is to make a statistical calculation

and try to find acceptable terms within which it can allow events such as pandemics to occur, while keeping them within neatly circumscribed boundaries.

In addition to the paradox of the state that we see in the state of exception, there is also a strange biopolitical paradox of preparedness that we are experiencing right now. The paradox typically goes like this: after a disaster—say, a pandemic or a famine—there is a drive within the security apparatus to begin preparing for the next disaster to come. After SARS in the 2000s, there was a big push to be prepared for the next coming pandemic. This over-preparedness then is put on the back burner when it comes to light that the next disease is not going to appear when we expect it to appear. The famed medical anthropologist Andrew Lakoff drew attention to this paradox, which we have seen again recently. There has been preparedness for pandemics, but the preparedness was then put on the back burner, so that when the COVID-19 pandemic came we were still not ready for it. We are dealing at once with two different types of paradox here: one that must venture outside of itself in order to found itself, and the other a cycle of preparedness that consistently generates unpreparedness.

There is the legal side and the statistical side of the state, the nation state in its classic form and this more global operation of security. I would like to argue that these two directives are colliding with each other and forming some sort of crisis.

Legal means to an ends have been in a constant state of crisis: Trump just can’t do anything right. Whatever he does seems to backfire, and it does not seem to always be the worst thing. Trump and his own deluded mind



has become an agent of anarchy. [10] Now of course he doesn't think he is—it is up to us, when this chaos reigns, to utilize this for our own ends. What I'm saying is that we need to inhabit this chaos that the state is inflicting upon itself.

Unlike liberals and reformists, we are not here to reaffirm and reassert law and order. We are not here to transform America into one big safe space. We are here to make the chaos and the disorder more terrible than it has ever been. We must do what revolutionaries have always done: we must make the contradiction intolerable.

## **7. AS THE REBEL-SLAVES DID WITH THE PERIODIC OUTBREAKS OF YELLOW FEVER IN HAITI, THERE IS A HIDDEN PARTISAN KNOWLEDGE TO BE UNCOVERED SURROUNDING THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC THAT ALSO CAN BE EXPLOITED AND WEAPONIZED AGAINST ESTABLISHED POWER.**

In the Imaginary Party's best book, entitled *To Our Friends* [11], the authors mention a pamphlet issued by the CDC in 2012 on the subject of disaster preparedness. [12] It is a part American Tiqqunists tend not to mention. In order to make disaster preparedness pertinent and hip to the youngsters, the CDC invokes the example of preparing for a zombie apocalypse. Their basic argument was that if people can prepare for a zombie apocalypse, they will be able to prepare for a natural disaster such as a flood, a storm, a pandemic, or even an insurrection.

The Invisible Committee argue in their book that this fear of zombies has a long and racialized history, linked in no uncertain terms to the fear of the Black proletariat. And the other side of

this fear that doesn't want to be mentioned, that refuses to be mentioned or is repressed, resides in the paranoia of the white middle class over its own worthlessness.

If we look back over the history of zombies, the figure of the zombie appeared within the voodoo utilized during the Haitian Revolution. There was a person by the name of Jean Zombi who ended up taking the name because he participated in the massacre of slave owners. What I think is particularly instructive for our purposes today is that the Haitian insurgents were perfectly aware that they could use the yellow fever pandemic against their former masters and against the army, whether this be Napoleon's army, or the party of order more generally. The insurgents waited until the yellow fever outbreak took hold. They knew that their former slave masters' army would be devoured by the pandemic, and they also knew that they had built up an immunity to that pandemic. So they waited until the army had been decimated by yellow fever, and then they launched their guerilla attacks.

What I am arguing for here is something very similar. We all know that Black people and brown people were disproportionately affected by the COVID pandemic. This is a medical problem. But it is much more than a mere medical-scientific problem, it is a political problem. We must reject the sort of sanitized liberal politics of safety that is afraid of the pandemic, that is largely a sanitary discourse around masks, distancing, etc. I know this is a political issue now. But, on the flip side, I'm not defending right-wing conspiracy theorist ideas that the pandemic does not exist, or that it is just a flu, etc.. What I'm proposing here is that we develop a kind of partisan knowledge—our

own knowledge about the pandemic—to exploit the pandemic for our own good, and to use the knowledge of the pandemic as a weapon against our enemies.

## **8. THE INSURRECTION WILL INVOLVE PRECISE COORDINATION FROM WITHIN THE CONSTELLATION OF RIOTS: THE PARADOXICAL ORGANIZATION OF DISORDER BEYOND ANY MEASURE OF CONTROL. ACCORDINGLY, THE PROBLEM OF INSURRECTION HAS EQUAL PARTS SOCIAL AND TECHNICAL DIMENSIONS.**

What I am advocating is a paradoxical ordering of disorder, an Organized Konfusion (for those who remember the rap group). To do this, we must read up on tactics: we must look into what exactly was smashed; what exactly was looted; and how and why the occupations were effective or ineffective. We need to think strategically about the chaos that we inflict in the streets.

What is more, we also need to anticipate new forms of tactics, struggles and strategies that will emerge, so as to intensify these struggles and tactics. We can anticipate that occupations and rent strikes are going to occur in the near future due to the looming threat of eviction that is occurring in all of our heavily gentrified cities. But I think we need to go beyond these defensive struggles and to be more creative and to initiate tactics that go on the offensive. In fact, what I am advocating here is employing the whole arsenal of proletarian strategies and tactics—from riots, to strikes, to blockades.

But we need to be creative in our tactics and strategies. As we have seen in the recent Twitter hacks, these are just as important.

What's important is that we be creative in how we deploy these strategies and tactics.

What is the modern equivalent of the telephone exchange in Barcelona that was so savagely fought over during the May Days in 1937? What is the modern equivalent of the St. Petersburg rail line that the insurgent workers fought so hard over in revolutionary Russia? We have a unique problem, in that we live in a huge country. We need to figure out creative ways to break this distance and utilize it for our own ends, i.e., as pure means.

## **9. MATERIALIZE THE EVER-PRESENT SPECTER OF A SECOND, MORE BALKANIZED, CIVIL WAR BY FRAGMENTING THE FRAGMENTS OF A CRUMBLING EMPIRE.**

At least since Trump was elected and took office, the archetype of civil war has been looming over this country. There are historical reasons for this. Since the American Civil War was for some the most traumatic experience this country has ever collectively undergone, and for others the most liberating, it stands as a figure that is continually recalled within the collective imaginary. But, I think there are also structural reasons. The fundamental operation of the state works by warding off the ubiquitous threat of civil war. The State as such can be thought of as that which blocks and inhibits civil war. What is unique about this country is our singular emancipatory tradition, which is itself bound up with our understanding of civil war.

I would otherwise here cite Kenneth Rexroth's excellent autobiography, where he explains that the radical abolitionists who took part in the Civil War gave birth to children who became the first era of the American socialist,

anarchist, and communist labor movement. [13] But I think the best example comes from Du Bois's classic book, *Black Reconstruction*. [14] It was the proletarian general strike of the ex-slaves that truly put the final nail in the coffin of slavery. It is precisely this lineage of an emancipatory, liberatory, but nonetheless violent, civil war that needs to be updated for its second coming. Another important precedent is Harry Haywood's "Black-Belt" thesis. As a member of the central committee of the Communist Party USA, Haywood argued that revolution in the United States of America would involve an independent Black state in the South. I think this is no longer feasible, but I think what he was grasping at, and was trying to deal with, was the problem of revolution in a country that is simply massive.

The revolution here presents a problem of sheer scale for us. This is, I think, why Haywood argued for the breaking apart of America. We have no historical precedent for a revolution in such a large, industrialized, and modern state, so we have a unique problem to grapple with.

I do not know exactly what this looks like. What is certain is that this country is already beginning to break and fracture, and it is up to us to break and fracture it further, into so many pieces that it can never be put back together again.

Revolution, here more than anywhere else, will involve the messy task of division. Here too, we have a unique problem, for we must avoid the rather aggressive, ugly, and dangerous nationalism that occurred in other cases of civil war that we have seen over the past forty years. I am not advocating another series of Yugoslav wars, nor am I advocating what has occurred in Syria. Nonetheless, we must harness civil war as an emancipatory liberatory power. The fundamental goal is to break apart America into a constellation of federated communes.

## 10. THE FULFILLMENT OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PROJECT IS ULTIMATELY AN INESCAPABLE ETHICAL OBLIGATION THAT EACH OF US HAVE TO THE DEAD AND THE EXPLOITED.

At the risk of sounding naive, I sincerely believe that the riots that we have all witnessed, and hopefully participated in, this summer have opened the window to insurrection and even a full-blown revolution. It is possible that I may be miscalculating the potentialities that have emerged. Still, it is entirely impossible for anyone to have participated in the current uprising without having the fundamental core of their being unalterably changed. As for myself, and I know for many of you, we feel the revolution deeply within our souls, and it changes our very outlook, the approach to how we live our lives. All the pervasive cynicism, all the rational self-interest, all the nihilism, all that is constitutive of the typical American citizen is slowly being worn away by the insurrection and the uprising. What this shows us is that the revolution is truly beyond us, truly beyond each and every one of us here. It surpasses all the boundaries thrown up by American individualism. It forces us to finally look beyond ourselves and recognize that America has wreaked havoc as an imperial power around the globe for a century.

And the fight is not only for the living, but also for the dead. We owe the revolution to the millions of slaves who never knew a second of freedom. What the long list of martyrs who have fallen during this uprising deserve from us is nothing other than the completion of the revolution.

Pasolini wrote an essay about a trip to America. What really took him was one of the phrases that no one says anymore but was a big part of the Civil Rights movement: "we need to throw our entire bodies into the struggle." [15] The dead of the struggle scream out for

vengeance, and we must avenge their deaths. As Benjamin famously put it, “not even the dead will be safe from the enemy if he is victorious”. [16] Tonight is the night to begin to settle accounts once and for all, to end their victorious reign upon the globe, and to allow the dead to finally rest.

## NOTES

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*Protestors raise their fists outside a burned Wendy's on the 3rd day following Rayshard Brooks shooting death by police in the restaurant parking lot, in Atlanta, Georgia, June 15, 2020.  
(Photo by Chandan Khanna/AFP)*

# HOW BLACK ANARCHISTS ARE KEEPING THE PROTEST MOVEMENT ALIVE

Vanessa Taylor

With a series of uprisings gripping the United States, President Trump has not hidden his disdain for protesters. Beyond his threats to Minneapolis protesters, and questionable executive orders, Trump has time and time again directed his ire at one particular group: “anarchists.” Trump’s constant invoking of anarchists to describe all protesters generally is a calculated attempt to delegitimize ongoing struggles — that much can clearly be seen in one of Trump’s tweets from earlier this week, where he wrote that protesters in Portland and Seattle were “actually ... sick and deranged anarchists and agitators.”

The immediate knee-jerk reaction to Trump’s baiting is to often argue that the people taking to the streets in Portland — a city that has been under siege by mysterious federal agents



— and Seattle are merely “protesters” and not “anarchists.” But remember the old saying: A broken clock is right twice a day. Trump may not be honest in his portrayal of anarchists, and he certainly does not have a clear view of the ongoing protests, but to deny anarchists’ presence altogether would be just as bold of a lie as the president’s.

Anarchists have been involved in protests across the country since the current social justice movement began in May. Rather than deny that anarchists exist, it’s more useful to acknowledge that in the middle of an insurrection summer best defined by a pursuit for Black liberation, Black anarchists are key to sustaining many of the ongoing uprisings. And while Trump may be out to scapegoat anarchy, Black anarchists are not allowing the president to scare them away from the work that has to be done.

Part of Trump’s invocation of anarchism depends on the broader American public’s ignorance of the term overall. Often, people are only familiar with anarchism in the form of entertainment like *V for Vendetta*, or imagine “anarchy” just as something that disaffected white people do. In the American imagination, anarchy is nothing more than chaos for chaos’ sake, detached from any political analysis or meaningful struggle for liberation.

But in *Teen Vogue*, labor journalist Kim Kelly defined anarchism as “a radical, revolutionary leftist political philosophy that advocates for the abolition of government, hierarchy, and all other unequal systems of power.” What it means to be a Black anarchist can look different from person to person. But Riley, who is part of *Salish Sea Black Autonomists* and organizes between Seattle and Olympia, Washington, said it has helped them articulate what is going on in the world in order to better confront it.

“The anarchist critique gave me the tools and language to better see and understand my

enemy and understand why and how the world is structured against me and my people,” Riley tells Mic. “But more importantly, anarchy gives me weapons and says, ‘Don’t wait for some future utopia, but live and fight right here and right now.’ It tells me not to be the capital or foot soldier for another’s project.”

Riley continued: “To me, being a Black anarchist is about fully embracing the life that is denied to us and living it in total conflict with the forces and structures that subjugate, exploit, and kill us — the state, the police, borders, capitalism and the economy, work, etc.” (Riley declined to provide their last name.)

For many Black anarchists, a commitment to radical politics also means putting community and care at the center of their own personal definitions. Makayla, an organizer from Philadelphia, tells Mic, “[Being a Black anarchist] is working to develop non-hierarchical communities and building mutual aid outside the colonial white supremacist structures. It is finding ways to heal people from state violence and learning ways to sustain ourselves as a people.”

Similarly, Tina, who is located in Dallas, Texas, says, “I think being a Black anarchist can mean many things. But for me, it means having my cake and eating it, too. It means, as a queer Black woman, that my liberation is everything and that I am willing to die for that, no matter the cost. Because I love liberation more than my own life.” Both women declined to provide their last names.

Black anarchists are not surprised by Trump’s continued baiting. For Tina, it harkens back to the Red Scare that grew particularly intense in the 1940s and early 1950s. During that period, the label “communist” was thrown around as haphazardly as Trump’s use of “anarchists,” with former Sen. Joseph McCarthy even forming the House Un-American Activities Committee

to investigate communism within the United States. McCarthy's campaign dealt devastating blows to the Black freedom struggle.

"Trump labeling protesters as anarchists is another form of white supremacy at work," Tina said. "Blackness is already anarchy in white folks' minds. I don't think a Black person necessarily has to call themselves an anarchist to be one, because in the land where whiteness is law and order you are already one."

Riley says it's too early to know the full effect of Trump's targeting, but "I know for sure there is going to be an intense crackdown on anarchists, probably on a level we haven't seen since the [Earth Liberation Front] was active in the early '90s and 2000's. Grand juries, federal indictments, house raids, informants, the works." However, Riley pointed out that on

the streets, Trump's commentary may actually inspire a pro-anarchist side effect similar to what happened in Spain in 2015: After a counter-terrorism operation against anarchists prompted public backlash, people used the viral hashtag #ITooAmAnAnarchist to express solidarity.

Trump's logic of anarchists being troublemakers also relies on the popular "outside agitator" narrative. The phrase came up early in the summer with Hennepin County officials in Minnesota blaming unrest in their city on people who live outside of the state. Later, an investigation by the local NBC affiliate station found that the vast majority of those arrested were, indeed, Minnesotans.

The "outside agitator" narrative isn't troubling just because of a few instances where officials were obviously wrong in deploying it,



*A protester holds a large raised fist sign at Columbus Circle in Manhattan, NY on June 14th, 2020.  
(Photo: Ira L. Black/Corbis)*

but also because it has roots in quelling dissent throughout history, from plantation owners in the South to massive corporations and beyond. The Twitter account Midwest People's History, an "ongoing chronicle of moments when ordinary people got organized and made history," wrote, "Though the specific term 'outside agitator' didn't become popular until the Civil Rights Movement, its sentiment was felt in the Antebellum South. In the wake of slave uprisings, 'outsider' accusations were often used by paranoid white slave owners to soothe their shaky nerves."

The presence of Black anarchists complicates the notion of an "outside agitator" — to describe anarchists as random white people outside of Black and otherwise oppressed communities is to erase Black anarchists — as well as the "peaceful" protester narrative that others try to conjure to oppose Trump. But why is there an obligation to be peaceful if you are dying? The reality is that there are Black anarchists who burn and loot, and it is not the ultimate sin some have tried making it out to be. Following the protests in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, Vicky Osterweil wrote "that for most of America's history, one of the most righteous anti-white supremacist tactics available was looting. The specter of slaves freeing themselves could be seen as American history's first image of Black looters."

In addition, Osterweil noted the problem with prioritizing and defending "property" in the United States. Namely, as Raven Rakia said, the term is racialized: "When property is destroyed by Black protesters, it must always be understood in the context of the historical racialization of property. When the same system that refuses to protect Black children comes out to protect windows, what is valued over Black people in America becomes very clear."

It is with this poignant reminder in mind

that one should read a statement from Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf earlier this month, where he said that "the city of Portland has been under siege for 47 straight days by a violent mob. ... Each night, lawless anarchists destroy and desecrate property, including the federal courthouse, and attack the brave law enforcement officers protecting it."

While Wolf makes strong claims, they do not capture the entire picture. Makayla identifies Black anarchists as "[being] on the front lines since day one," assisting other protesters by teaching useful organizing tactics. For example, one common — and vital — protest skill associated with anarchists is street medicine. These skills are vital during protests when the state is often the one harming people and calling 911 for medical assistance is no longer an option. Makayla added, "Even before the uprising, Black anarchists have been making sure the needs of the community are met while those needs were being ignored elsewhere."

Riley offers a similar sentiment, crediting older trans anarchists with providing them housing when they were homeless after leaving an abusive situation as a teenager. The broader anarchist community also offered them food and clothing and helped them find a job. "I try to return the favor when I can, but if it weren't for the anarchists I'm sure I'd be dead by now," Riley says.

After the coronavirus pandemic began, many anarchists provided necessary aid to their neighbors to help them endure. Riley says that the community "stepped up to distribute food, masks, and hand sanitizer, as well as continued to do needle exchange." They also tell Mic that anarchists have been "continually ... writing to and supporting prisoners, bailing people out when we can, and of course pushing protests to be more conflictual."

Summer is far from over, and it seems that

the same can be said for the uprisings. The work may look different depending on the city, but at the end of the day, Black anarchists are striving for a liberation that requires the total upheaval of social order as it stands now. And while Trump is likely to embark on many more social media tirades against anarchists, Makayla hopes people come to understand that anarchist

tactics “require communication, trust, and compromise.”

“It’s about building community and transformative justice models so that people actually heal and become better,” Makayla said. “We are more likely to want to bake cookies than light things on fire, but laying down to fascism and racism is complicity.”



*Photo of car aflame in front of graffiti stating "Black Lives Matter"*  
*(Photographer unknown)*



# ON THE BLACK LEADERSHIP AND OTHER WHITE MYTHS

The We Still Outside Collective

What they call, “the Black leadership,” does not exist. Let’s be serious: what they are talking about is nothing more than a figment of the white liberal imagination. That is, if these so-called Black leaders even exist at all, then they can only be found shucking and jiving a “woke” white person’s head.

Isn’t it interesting how progressive whites seem to have a direct line of communication with Black leaders, while everyone else in the street fails to suffer from the same delusional schizophrenia? What’s all the more odd is that the voices that they hear from these magical negroes always manage to say the same things: “Everyone should peacefully protest on the sidewalk, because unmediated Black rage makes others uncomfortable.” “Don’t strike back at that cop even if he wants to kill you and everyone you

*The following editorial comes from from a Black affinity group and critiques the concept of “Black leadership,” and how it connects with liberal and reformist approaches.*



love.” “I know the manager follows Black kids from aisle to aisle, but still, his store shouldn’t be looted.” In other words, the message relayed from the sounds on repeat in a white liberal’s head is to end the Black revolt and conduct civil disobedience in a manner that is appropriate for Karen and Ethan, not Jamal and Keisha.

It is worthwhile to note that Black people, ourselves, never refer to any mythical Black leadership. This is because we know, full and well, that all of our leaders, since Martin and Malcolm, have been killed. Even our potential leaders, like Trayvon and Tamir, are gunned down before they can share with us their vision. What’s more, if they are not brutally murdered, then they are locked away forever with Sundiata, Mutulu, and Mumia. That is, we know that if you speak with truth and move against oppression, then the only way to avoid the pig’s bullet or penitentiary, the modern-day cracker’s whip or plantation, is to go on the run like Assata Olugbala Shakur! In fact, any Black person that says otherwise should be exposed for what he or she is: a poverty-pimp!

After half a century without a figurehead in the front, the Black youth has shown the whole country that they are more than capable of setting their own path and directing their

own initiatives. They have demonstrated to us a dynamism that can never be reduced to a homogeneous mass following of anyone or one authoritative voice. Paradoxically, it is the entire spectrum of the Black revolt in the streets that can be identified as leaderless “leaders,” since they have shown everyone else what it means to free yourself.

To paraphrase James Baldwin’s still apt observation, we Black people are more aware of the inner workings of our pale-face antagonists than they are of themselves. Consequently, the diagnosis of woke whiteness’s psychological condition is quite simple: this James Earl Jones, Carl Winslow, or Rafiki from the Lion King voice, which bellows off the walls of their skull, is a defense mechanism against their inability to completely repress their own white superiority complex. What’s also abundantly clear is that the only way to fully work through this hang up is to gain even a small percent of the courage of a Black adolescent and overcome their white guilt with a fist, a stone, and a Molotov cocktail.

– The We Still Outside Collective

P.S. Fuck 12!





*Cops and Protestors face off at Columbus statue in Chicago's Grant Park, July 17, 2020  
(Photo: ABC Chicago)*

# ON THE LIMITS OF IDENTITY POLITICS

Brazo & Turner

Since the beginning of the George Floyd rebellion on May 26th, 2020 we have seen an enormous wave of national and international support for the uprising, even in the face of millions of dollars lost to looting, expropriations, and property destruction around the US. This uprising has been marked by the 3rd police precinct in Minneapolis being turned to ash, the construction of the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone in Seattle, and the burning of the Department of Corrections building in Kenosha after yet another shooting of an unarmed Black man named Jacob Blake. The repressive apparatus of the State has returned the volley in this social war with thousands of protesters of all different stripes facing long prison sentences, and of course, the federal occupation of the city of Portland.

There are a myriad of different ways one could choose to analyze, critique, and understand what has happen in the past few months. For us it is important to choose a method that reflects our politics. Unlike historical, sociological or Marxist texts that use the scientific method in order to generalize a “grand narrative” of past events, we hope to create one story among many for use in the liberatory project. We attempt to do this by using specific examples from peoples’ subjective experiences both past and present, as well as more abstract analytical tools that are specific to the US context. Since rebellions around the world are on the rise it has been a trend to attempt to draw translatable conclusions from Hong Kong to Argentina, from Lebanon to Greece, and while there are some generalizable characteristics, they are, by and large only tactical. Each rebellion has its own particulars that make it blossom. Routine generalization for sake of scientific accuracy masks more than it reveals, and is part of the academic imperial and colonial project.

One monumental point for understanding the specificity of the US Black liberation struggle, and race relations in general, is articulated by Hannah Arendt when she says, “The US is not a nation...This country is united neither by heritage, nor by memory, nor by soil, nor by language, nor by origin.” The early slave ships and native concentration camps are a case in point. Arendt was a Jew in Germany during the rise of Hitler and after being arrested by the Gestapo fled Germany and eventually ended up in the US. Her experience helped shape her understanding of the US and its statecraft, being significantly different than other European countries which had some type of commonality before the formation of the State itself. The criterion for citizenry in the US is the simple consent to the constitution. We are constantly reminded by the State of the sacredness of this scrap of paper.

The US is a country “ruled by law, not by men” and this important dynamic illustrates both the liberal and conservative obsession with law and order, it is the only thing holding together American society. For the US, the State is the unifier and is the commonality. This order is one shaped by capital’s necessary exploitation of labor and the racial hierarchy it requires.

The war the US government has waged on different groups: Indigenous people against State sponsored genocide, or slaves and abolitionists against slavery (culminating in the Civil War) has never ended, with the continued seizure of Native lands for extraction projects like Standing Rock, or the continuation of slave labor with special clauses in the 13th amendment, allowing for slave labor as long as the person is classified as a “criminal.” Thus the modern slave catchers, known as the police, continue their raids in our communities, and are met with our resistance. What we have witnessed during this rebellion is not new, but the residual conflicts that make up the fabric of US society. Furthermore we can see that in order to permanently rupture this relationship of domination and violence we must attack the state and allow for our own more liberatory relationships to take its place.

“While spearheaded by a Black avant-garde, this largely multi-ethnic rebellion managed to spontaneously overcome codified racial divisions. The containment of the revolt aims at reinstating these rigid lines of separation and policing their boundaries.”

*From “How it Might Should be Done” by Idris Robinson*

Of the many counterinsurgency tactics used to shut down the uprisings, the increased policing of identity during demonstrations has been an important method used to pacify our movements towards liberal and reformist

ends. Motivated by white guilt and identity authoritarianism, performative activists demanded “white people to the frontline,” as if their privilege can stop rubber bullets, or the more nullifying demands of self-appointed Black leadership to only use non-violent tactics to accomplish all political goals. The liberal post civil rights era mythology has constructed an archetype of the authentic political actor. This actor is modeled after the most palatable people for the State, non-violent resisters who seek reform. Henry David Thoreau and Dr. Martin Luther King in the US context are the back bone of this modeled form of acceptable political action. In Thoreau’s words, “Under a government which imprisons any unjustly...the true place for a just man is also a prison.” Both Thoreau and King, in practicing nonviolent civil disobedience, accept the logic of the State and its prisons. Identity politics has muddled the water between identifying with a systematically oppressed group, and prescribing what actions should be taken to end that oppression. There is no inherent relationship between who you are, and what you do, this is an act of will.

The current use of identity politics is policing identity (who can and cannot act based on who they are) and by extension police what acceptable political action looks like. This explains why those who act outside those bounds of behavior are labeled “white” or “outside agitators,” regardless of who is actually carrying out these actions. Raoul Vaneigem succinctly observed “the role is a model form of behavior... Access to roles is ensured by identification. The need to identify is more important to Power’s stability than the models identified with.” The policing of identity is a crucial part of reifying roles within power.

Before Oakland’s first night of major upheaval on May 29th, the self appointed black leader of Oakland, Cat Brooks (who is

actually from Las Vegas) denounced the protest via Twitter before the demonstration even happened:

*Let me be CLEAR: white people DON'T get to use Black pain to justify living out your riot fantasies. What's happening in Minneapolis is BLACK LEAD Rebellion. That can't be manufactured and we ain't going back in time in Oakland. Please don't make me come off this mountain.*

These sentiments have been spread by authoritarians and recuperative state leaders during the rebellion in every city in the US. Had Cat been on the ground and not “on the mountain” the first day of the rebellion, she would have witnessed what we have been seeing on the street since the Oscar Grant rebellion. A multi-ethnic multitude coming together like a match and gasoline, the college student and the project resident standing side by side overcoming, spontaneously, all divisions imposed on them by society, to light a fire that never goes out.

The following night, after heavy rioting the leaders tried to reinstate peace and control by calling for a sit in demonstration at 14th and Broadway. Thousands flooded the streets and sat in an intersection for over an hour listening to speeches and eventually went home. The correct order had been restored.

While it is true that the “multi-ethnic rebellion managed to spontaneously overcome codified racial divisions” during the first days of the rebellion, it is worth exploring further the types of insurgent abolitionist relationships in US history to give us examples on how it might be done, and what long term multi-ethnic rebellion is capable of. The last movement for abolition in the US escalated into a civil war, with former slaves and abolitionists leading the charge. This is best personified in the relationship between



Harriet Tubman and John Brown. Meeting for the 1st time on April 7th 1858 to plan the raid on Harpers Ferry, which sought to take over a West Virginian military arsenal in order to arm slaves in the south to start a slave insurrection. Their first encounter, noted by historian Phillip Thomas Tucker, is exemplary “important on a number of different levels was the fact that the expertise of the black radical world – in the form of Harriet Tubman in this case – was coming together at the right time and the right place with the radical white world (leading Northern abolitionists as best personified by John Brown).”

By the time the two had met, they had already known each other through reputation, Harriet Tubman having freed over 300 slaves through the underground railroad, and John Brown at that time known for freeing slaves in Missouri with use of guerrilla tactics and most notably the murder of 5 pro-slavery settlers in the Kansas Territory. Their relationship created “a deep bond... one of the most unique relationships in all America consisting of two remarkable individuals... A white man and a Black women were thoroughly united as one in a single spirit in regard to their holy war and mission, which overcame racial and gender differences in an entirely unique and symbiotic relationship that was extremely rare in America in 1858.” Without both of these individuals the abolition of slavery in the US would not have been possible, both Black and white together for the same goal: abolition.

A more contemporary example of multi-ethnic rebellion can be drawn from the modern plantation system, the prison. In California at the Pelican Bay state prison in 2011, the Short-Corridor collective was formed, and 3 years later initiated the California state prison hunger strike, which included 29,000 inmates throughout CA prisons:

*The creators of the Corridor Collective and also the leaders behind the strike were Todd Ashker, Arturo Castellanos, Ronnie Dewberry, and Antonio Guillen. Each of the leaders were prisoners within the Pelican Bay Prison SHU (Security Housing Unit), with Ashker being a member of the Aryan Brotherhood, Castellanos belonging to the LA street gang Florencia 13, Dewberry being in the Black Guerrilla Family, and Guillen in the Nuestra Familia gang.*

The strike sought “an end to long-term solitary confinement, along with group punishments, better and more nutritious food, along with ending policies surrounding the identification and treatment of suspected gang members.” In the depths of some of the harshest conditions of oppression in the modern world, these prisoners found solidarity as the only weapon between vastly different groups in order to strike back against the prison system. One means of accomplishing such a goal was printed in their statement Agreement to End Hostilities:

*Therefore, beginning on October 10, 2012, all hostilities between our racial groups... in SHU, Ad-Seg, General Population, and County Jails, will officially cease. This means that from this date on, all racial group hostilities need to be at an end... and if personal issues arise between individuals, people need to do all they can to exhaust all diplomatic means to settle such disputes; do not allow personal, individual issues to escalate into racial group issues!*

As revolutionaries and abolitionists we must take the example from these brave freedom fighters. The racial divisions imposed in the prison system are exemplary of the divisions throughout society. The mechanisms of repression and division are not as clear on the outside of a cell.

At this juncture we must return our attention to two examples that help us understand and

resist the mechanisms of hierarchical division that are entrenched in the language of identity politics. After the Grand Jury decision was announced by Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron in the case of Breonna Taylor, organizer and activist Tamika Mallory made a statement about the verdict that points to a nuance in identity politics that is rarely spoken about, she states:

*As I lay and cried for and hurt for Tamika Palmer, for Breonna Taylor, for Kenny Walker...I thought about him (Daniel Cameron) saying he is a black man – I thought about the ships that went into Fort Monroe, and Jamestown with our people on them over 400 years ago, and how there were also Black men on those ships that were responsible for bringing our people over here. Daniel Cameron is no different than the sellouts who sold our people into slavery and helped white men capture our people. You were used by the system to harm your own Black mama, we have no respect for you, no respect for your Black skin, because all of our skin folk, are not our kinfolk.*

Tamika shows us the historical continuity between past and present, between the Black “sellouts” of the slave ships, and the Black Attorney General who is complicit in the murder of Breonna Taylor. Tamika temporarily throws off the lens of identity politics to view the actions of Daniel Cameron as they stand, and for who they serve, and revokes his ability to use his identity to hide behind his cowardice. It is Cameron’s actions, not his identity that make him a servant for white supremacy.

Armed white supremacist groups have been making more appearances enacting or threatening the use of violence all of over the US in response to the uprisings for black liberation. Right-wing protestors have been firing into crowds of BLM protestors, Alan Swinney of the Proud Boys was seen pointing a gun a

protestors, and 17 year old white supremacist Kyle Rittenhouse shot three people and killed two in a march in Kenosha, Wisconsin. In Portland, Oregon after several weeks of protests after the murder of George Floyd, on August 29, 2020 in an act of revolutionary solidarity, antifascist Michael shot and killed an armed white supremacist Aaron J. Danielson. Reinoehl conducted an interview about the killing on VICE. He admits killing Danielson as an act of self-defense and in the interview said, “I could have sat there and watched them kill a friend of mine of color. But I wasn’t going to do that.” A week later on September 3rd, Reinoehl was assassinated by the FBI and US Marshals. Both examples point to the abandonment of the use of pure identity as a determinant for action. Cameron, the Attorney General who should have supported Breonna Taylor as a Black man, chose to serve white supremacy; Michael Reinoehl who is a beneficiary of white privilege, sacrificed his life to stand in solidarity with people of color.

In identity politics’ quest to find the most oppressed, we sort through the different identity formations looking for the most authentic actor for change. But as Frantz Fanon the Algerian writer on decolonization has pointed out; decolonization and liberation are processes, whereby acting defines and creates a new human being:

*Decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally...It brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men, and with it a new language and a new humanity.*

This understanding is of the utmost importance and simultaneously points to the shortcomings of identity based politics. Far from its point of origin in Black feminism in late 1970’s,

US identity politics now focuses mainly on individual behavior and attitudes as reflections of social privilege and oppression. Elevating individual behaviors as the only representations of oppression, signifies a retreat from politics and the material conditions of oppression itself. Arguing over 'who is allowed to burn the police station' before lighting a single match, many activists, non-profits, NGO's and politicians make a living on continuously pronouncing that their particular brand of action is authentic and effective, when it is anything but this, to do this they rely heavily on representation and mediation of our rightful hatred of these systems.

The theories of identity politics suit us in understanding the hegemonic racial hierarchy

and identity, but to make the error of allowing them to essentialize us and define us in our totality simply reinforces power, by denying new constructions and formations of identity and solidarity through struggle. We must begin to judge one another based on what we do, and not solely on who we are perceived to be. If we believe in radical social change we must also believe individuals are capable of radical change as well and to recognize that the actions taken in the streets in the last few months have already fundamentally changed the people who participated in the uprising. What is required of us now is the ability to make those changes legible to ourselves by opening up our understandings of who the participants are in this struggle for collective liberation.





*Protestor smashes store window  
(Photographer unknown)*

# FUCK IDENTITY WE NEED SOLIDARITY

Pittsburgh Radical Perspectives

*Pittsburgh Radical Perspectives is a collective of students who have been participating in the movement for black lives and in the struggle of latinx people against state-sanctioned violence. We are anarchists, afropessimists, maoists, and socialists that are united in our desire for an autonomous revolutionary movement.*

## 1 . WE NEED AUTONOMOUS ORGANIZING!

As a group of people of color, women, queers, and poor people coming together to attack a complex matrix of oppression and exploitation, we believe in the absolute necessity of autonomous organizing. By “autonomous” we mean the formation of independent groups of people who face specific forms of exploitation and oppression – including but not limited to people of color, women, queers, trans\* people, gender nonconforming people, QPOC. But that doesn’t mean we think that we can organize for liberation without crossing racial, gender, and sexual divisions.

Accounts of racial, gender, and sexual oppression as “intersectional” continue to treat identity categories as coherent communities with shared values and ways of knowing the world.



No individual or organization can speak for people of color, women, the world's colonized populations, workers, or any demographic category as a whole – although activists of color, female and queer activists, and labor activists from the Global North routinely and arrogantly claim this right. These “representatives” and institutions speak on behalf of social categories which are not, in fact, communities of shared opinion. This representational politics tends to eradicate any space for political disagreement between individuals subsumed under the same identity categories.

We must explore the question of relationship between identity based oppression and capitalism. We must reject a vulgar “class first” politics which argues that racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia are derivatives of economic exploitation. It is true however that one can not end, for example, the fact that the US is a white supremacist nation with a legally constructed “white race” which is given some privileges, without organizing the white poor and working class in alliance with BIPOC.

## **2. THE SITUATION TODAY! NONPROFITS AGAINST REVOLUTION**

Nonprofits are here to not just provide vital social services in the spaces left by the state's retreat from postwar welfare provisions, but are the 21st century public face of counterinsurgency, except this time speaking the language of civil, women's, and gay rights, charged with preempting political conflict, and spiritually committed to promoting one-sided “dialogue” with armed state bureaucracies. Over the last four decades, a massive nonprofit infrastructure has evolved in order to prevent, whether through force or persuasion, another outbreak of the urban riots and rebellions which spread through northern ghettos in the mid to

late 1960s. Racial justice nonprofits, and an entire institutionally funded activist infrastructure, partner with the state to echo the rhetoric of past movements for liberation while implicitly or explicitly condemning their militant tactics.

When we look at Pittsburgh, we see countless examples. Philanthropic organizations like the Heinz Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and many others have grown exponentially, not only as a result of the direct privatization of America's New Deal-era social safety net, but to endow many activist organizations and nonprofits. We are the city of Andrew Carnegie, where the library system was literally built to throw off its workers.

“With increasing frequency,” Filipino prison abolitionist and professor Dylan Rodriguez argues, “we are party (or participant) to a white liberal ‘multicultural’/‘people of color’ liberal imagination which venerates and even fetishizes the iconography and rhetoric of contemporary Black and Third World liberation movements, and then proceeds to incorporate these images and vernaculars into the public presentation of foundation-funded liberal or progressive organizations. ...[T]hese organizations, in order to protect their nonprofit status and marketability to liberal foundations, actively self-police against members’ deviations from their essentially reformist agendas, while continuing to appropriate the language and imagery of historical revolutionaries. Having lived in the San Francisco Bay Area from 1995-2001, which is in many ways the national hub of the progressive ‘wing’ of the NPIC, I would name some of the organizations...here, but the list would be too long. Suffice it to say that the nonprofit groups often exhibit(ed) a political practice that is, to appropriate and corrupt a phrase from...Ruth Wilson Gilmore, radical in form, but liberal in content.”

## ON PROMOTING VOTING AND ELECTIONS

In Pennsylvania some of the most racist policies and “reforms” have been advanced by politicians of color. With an election year, we have had it pushed on us that we should be interested in increasing the racial, gender, and sexual diversity of existing hierarchies of power. When police departments and municipal governments can boast of their diversity and multicultural credentials, we know that there needs to be a radical alternative to this politics of “inclusion.” Pittsburgh and neighboring municipalities are perhaps one of the most glaring examples of how people of color have not just participated in but in many instances led – as mayors, police chiefs, and city council members – the assault on poor and working class Black and brown populations. Wilkinsburg Mayor Marita Garret, for example, speaks the language of social justice activism and civil rights but her political career in municipal government clearly depends upon satisfying right-wing business interests, corrupt real estate speculators, and a bloated and notoriously brutal police force.

In Pittsburgh there are City Councilmen R. Daniel Lavelle and Ricky Burgess, both who supported increasing funding for militarized policing to control an unruly population, especially poor people of color, and have supported several gentrifying developmental projects. Burgess in particular wantonly ignored the demands of Penn Plaza tenants.

Even the “progressive” politicians like Summer Lee and Olivia Bennet are like the reformist Prime Ministers of Third World democracies, attempting to pass reforms and encouraging passivity and confidence in an undemocratic process, but because the police are like an army uncommitted to following their civilian governments direction, these politicians attempts at reforms are denounced and organized

campaigns to oust them make their “electoral path” impossible. Like Allende or Mossadeq, they are disregarded in their reform attempts. The police prowls, categorizing, and profiling, engaging in mass death as part of their routine business. Making hunters of human beings more diverse is farcical.

## CAPITALISM, GENDER, RACE

Establishing community mutual aid and self-defense against the violence of emergent mainstream racist movements, against the systematic rape and exploitation of women, and against the systematic murder and/or economic ostracization of transgender and gender-nonconforming people, are all part and parcel of finding greater unity in our common struggle to racism.

We do not believe that autonomous groups will be able to sustain themselves without creating non-state based support networks and without recognizing the mutual implication of white supremacy with capitalism and patriarchy.

Capitalism can neither be reduced to the “predatory practices of Wall Street banks” nor is it something which “intersects” with race, gender, and sexual oppression. Capitalism is a system based on a gendered and racialized division of labor, resources, and suffering. In the US in particular, the celebration of cultural diversity, the recognition of cultural difference, the applauding of women and queers entering the workplace, and the relative decline of overtly racist or sexist beliefs among younger generations, has not improved but instead masked a dramatic deterioration of the material circumstances of racialized populations.

The US economy reproduces racial, gender, and sexual inequality at every level of American society—in housing, healthcare, food sovereignty, education, policing, and prison. The category

of “race” is materially recreated and endlessly renewed through these institutions which organize the lives of the undocumented, the imprisoned, the residents of aging ghettos which increasingly function as open-air prisons.

Speaking of capitalism as though it were somehow separable from racist exploitation, gendered violence, and the gamut of complex oppressions facing us in this world, confines antiracist and antipatriarchal struggle to the sphere of culture, consciousness, and individual privilege. The current dominant form of anti-oppression politics in fact diminishes the extent to which racialized and gendered inequalities are deepening across society despite the generalization of policies promoting linguistic, cultural, gender, and sexual inclusivity.

To destroy this means a great alliance of autonomous groups and cross-identity organizing, not on the basis of guilt or requiring “reparations” from working class and poor whites who simply do not have access to the capital to make such a thing possible, but on the need for mutual liberation of all.

### **3. ANTI-OPPRESSION THEORY & PRACTICE IN PITTSBURGH HAS FAILED!**

Privilege theory and cultural essentialism have incapacitated antiracist, feminist, and queer organizing in this country by confusing identity categories with solidarity and reinforcing stereotypes about the political homogeneity and helplessness of “communities of color.” The category of “communities of color” is itself a recently invented identity category which obscures the central role that anti-Black racism plays in maintaining an American racial order and conceals emerging forms of nonwhite interracial conflict.

Understanding racism as primarily a matter of individual racial privilege, and the symbolic

affirmation of marginalized cultural identities as the solution to this basic lack of privilege, is the dominant and largely unquestioned form of anti-oppression politics in the US today. According to this politics, whiteness simply becomes one more “culture,” and white supremacy a psychological attitude, instead of a structural position of dominance reinforced through institutions, civilian and police violence, access to resources, and the economy.

Identity categories are treated like they indicate political unity or agreement. Gender, sexual, and economic domination within racial identity categories have typically been described through an additive concept, intersectionality, which continues to assume that political agreement is automatically generated through the proliferation of existing demographic categories. Representing significant political differences as differences in privilege or culture places politics beyond critique, debate, and discussion, leading to many opportunists taking over and coopting the movement.

For too long individual racial privilege has been taken to be the problem, and state or nonprofit managed racial and ethnic “cultural diversity” within existing hierarchies of power imagined to be the solution. It is a well-worn activist formula to point out that “representatives” of different identity categories must be placed “front and center” in struggles against racism, sexism, and homophobia. But this is meaningless without also specifying the content of their politics. The US Army is simultaneously one of the most racially integrated and oppressive institutions in American society. We must urge all white “accomplices” - there is no singular “Black leadership” and don’t feel guilty into following those that claim that they are!

In looking at our anti-oppression activists – who do advance a structural analysis of

oppression and yet consistently align themselves with a praxis that reduces the history of violent and radically unsafe antislavery, anticolonial, antipatriarchal, antihomophobic, and anticentric freedom struggles to struggles over individual privilege and state recognition of cultural difference. Even when these activists invoke a history of militant resistance and sacrifice, they consistently fall back upon strategies of petitioning the powerful to renounce their privilege or “allow” marginalized populations to lead resistance struggles. This was the case in Pittsburgh, as it was elsewhere.

For too long there has been no alternative to this politics of privilege and cultural recognition, and so rejecting this liberal political framework has become synonymous with a refusal to seriously address racism, sexism, and homophobia in general. Even and especially when people of color, women, and queers imagine and execute alternatives to this liberal politics of cultural inclusion, they are persistently attacked as white, male, and privileged by the cohort that maintains and perpetuates the dominant praxis. Is it any surprise that unlike Salt Lake City, Portland, Atlanta, and other places where the rebellion continued, there wasn’t as powerful of a trend to relinquish power over to political representatives? Pittsburgh is a city with a vast nonprofit industrial complex and a class of professional “community spokespeople” who define the parameters of acceptable political action and debate. This politics of safety must continually project an image of powerlessness and keep communities of color, women, and queers “protected” and confined to speeches and mass rallies rather than active disruption. For this politics of cultural affirmation, suffering is legitimate and recognizable only when it conforms to white middle-class codes of behavior, with each gender in its proper place, and only if it speaks a language of productivity,

patriotism, and self-policing victimhood.

And yet the vast majority of us are not “safe” simply going through our daily lives in Pittsburgh, or elsewhere. When activists claim that poor black and brown communities must not defend themselves against racist attacks or confront the state, including using illegal or “violent” means, they typically advocate instead the performance of an image of legitimate victimhood for white middle class consumption. The activities of marginalized groups are barely recognized unless they perform the role of peaceful and quaint ethnics who by nature cannot confront power on their own. Fuck reproducing stereotypes of passivity and powerlessness, fuck voting, and fuck not defending our right to land and housing, our right to live without police murdering us!

When activists argue that people should follow “Black leadership,” it is clear that their primary audience for these appeals can only be liberal white activists, and that they understand power as something which is granted or bestowed by the powerful. Appeals to white benevolence to let people of color “lead political struggles” assumes that white activists can somehow relinquish their privilege and legitimacy to oppressed communities and that these communities cannot act and take power for themselves.

And of course it is extremely advantageous to the powers that be for the oppressed to be infantilized and deterred from potentially “unsafe” self-defense, resistance, or attack. The absence of active mass resistance to racist policies and institutions in Pittsburgh and in the US over the last forty years has meant that life conditions have worsened for nearly everyone. Thankfully this is turning around, but it is not because “Black leadership” (largely inadequate here) has led the rallies, it’s because Black and other oppressed people have disregarded the

orders of these peace police and have written in the streets with fire.

And when it comes to “allies” many of them have been guilted into following false leaders. They have been told and bought into the racist logic of communities of color being single, homogeneous blocs with identical political opinions. Yet for identity politicians or those chasing clout, claiming that they have such a program and homogenizing us helps them build up a white fanbase. This has proven to be fundamentally conservative, silencing, and coercive, especially for people of color who reject that analysis and field of action.

#### 4. PITTSBURGH AS AN EXAMPLE!

After May 30th County Councilwoman Olivia Bennet took to Facebook to decry “white anarchists.” The same claim would be echoed by Mayor Bill Peduto and the Chief of Police, Scott Schubert. Nevermind the DADT’s published arrests over time, showing the several Black and POC arrested for participating in the rebellion! It became a potent narrative in enforcing social peace. In our experience such misrepresentations were not accidental or isolated incidents but a feature of anti-oppression politics in the city which outlined how, instead of mobilizing people of color, women, and queers for independent action, people of color were erased and interracial coalition-building made impossible intentionally.

Enforcing peace has become part and parcel of every street protest after May 30. The exception of course being the East Liberty protest. At this protest the organizers had chosen to respect the state enforced curfew, ending the rally an hour and a half before the curfew was even due to start at 7:30 PM. One of them started playing “Where is the Love?” by Black Eyed Peas (not joking!) as they hoped the crowd would dissipate. Soon

after young Black organizers not affiliated with the main group began urging people who were on the sidewalk to continue, and were soon joined by white anarchists and communists chanting “off the sidewalk, into the streets!” One of the organizers attacked the young Black agitators, telling them that they were being swayed by the white people who joined them. They were summarily dismissed, and correctly so - none of us are too stupid to take advice or criticism from white people, especially those who share our desire for liberation!

By now though, because of the intervention of the identity politicians and pro-electioneering organizers, most Black working class people have left the movement and stopped attending the events! You go to a rally and it is mostly self-identified “white allies” yearning for the approval of prominent organizers. There is no one left to call out the bullshit, because these certified allies are too blinded in recognizing the bullshit, too afraid of being labeled “racists” themselves, or of “centering” their own perspectives. Today the last demonstrations are “Uncivil Saturdays” which, though not bought off and tied to electioneering, have bought into the same guilting of white people as the road to liberation.

At one event, one of the main organizers, not only left a strobelight on, discomfoting epileptics and then later dismissing people asking for not including the strobelight by saying “I ain’t your mammie” (because being asked nicely to be a decent person that does not want people to die from seizures is equivalent to being a racialized figure of a Black femme that expends emotional labor on white people’s children), but then individually started shining a flashlight on white and Latinx people at the event. “Have you given money to Black femmes this week?” After guilty answers of “no!” filled the sound of the night, the organizer proceeded to tell them they



should be giving money to their legal defense before they eat. When one person said that they had overdrawn on his checking account, the organizer told the person that if they had Hulu or Netflix they should cancel it in order to fund their account. Another young organizer proceeded to accuse the white people there of having a capitalist mindset for not giving money to Gam.

The truth is this. Broke white people are not going to be able to aggregate their low wages together to defeat racism and pay reparations, because you can not “buy” away capitalism’s need for racialized hierarchies in the first place. Those reparations can only be seized through overthrowing capitalism and taking that back pay back through forcing the corporate and state actors who have profited from the legacy of colonialism and capitalism to pay up. And you can only get those reparations by allying with broke white people to organize to overthrow this system. In fact, hating on poor white people who are coming out and attending your protests consistently is indeed a capitalist mindset!

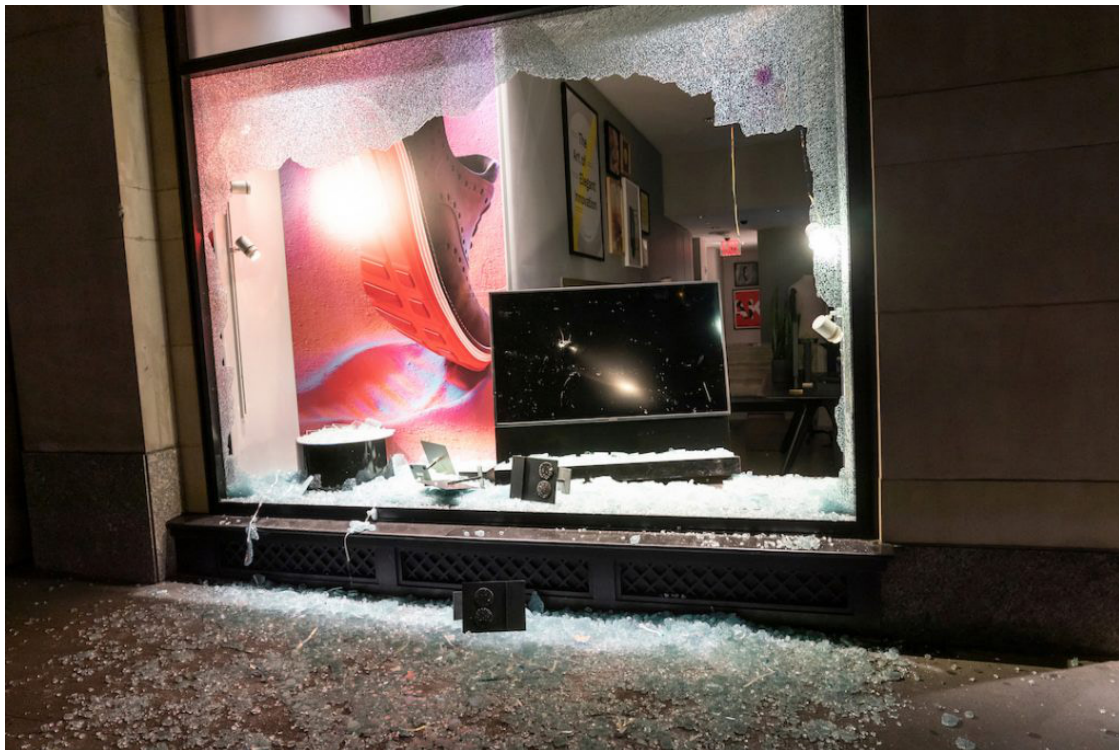
Organizers who do not support the voting shit must study the tradition of Toussaint L’Ouverture, Jean Jacques Dessalines, Lucy Parsons, Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Angela Davis, Robert F. Williams, Lorenzo Komboa Ervin, the Third World Women’s Alliance, CONAIE, the indigenous militants of Bolivia in 1990, the militants of Oaxaca in 2006, the Mohawk people in the Municipality of Oka, Tupac Katari, Chris Hani, Nelson Mandela (who led the ANC’s armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe), Emiliano Zapata, Juan “Cheno” Cortina, Jose Rizal, Bhagat Singh, Yuri Kochiyama, Kuwasi Balagoon, DRUM, Assata Shakur, and countless other, who often enlisted the support of white revolutionaries and saw the path to liberation in the international and national support of all oppressed people.

All must study and grasp that anticolonial struggles are violent and radically unsafe. Pittsburgh must grasp that, while rituals of cultural affirmation are nice, they are not what will destroy that which kills us consistently. That the terrain of conflict is not within the public discourse, but is rather with the material infrastructure of this system, and the social hierarchies that both sustain and reproduce it. That it’s not white radicals who put us in “harm’s way,” but often our own self-appointed representatives.

That those who would build their brand off representing “us,” those who appropriate the iconography of past radical movements and remake it in their own sick image, those who insist that everyone who won’t fall in with their agenda is violating the will of “the” leadership... they all work for the purpose of perpetuating this system.

Towards a revolutionary solidarity,  
Pittsburgh Radical Perspectives





*Broken window at a Cole Haan storefront in New York, June 1st, 2020  
(Photo: Lev Radin)*

# STEALING AWAY IN AMERICA

Zoé Samudzi

*Since* the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer on May 25th, the country has been seized by protests against police brutality. In addition to peaceful marches and demonstrations, there have also been dramatic scenes of looting and property damage: for example, the burning of Minneapolis's Third Precinct, which was preceded by looting of shops in the surrounding neighborhood, including a Target. These scenes—and similar ones in cities across the nation—have prompted the return of familiar arguments about looting that have periodically arisen for years—including, in recent memory, during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the 1992 LA riots that followed the police assault of Rodney King.

This debate was also reactivated six years ago at the beginning of the Ferguson uprisings, after the murder of Michael Brown, when many pundits

and lay commentators praised the peaceful protests against police brutality while forcefully condemning looting as misguided or even counterproductive. In response, Vicky Osterweil published the essay “In Defense of Looting” in *The New Inquiry*. In the essay, Osterweil refuses the moralistic distinction between “non-violent protesters” and “looters,” writing that looting actually reveals “precisely how, in a space without cops, property relations can be destroyed and things can be had for free.” She also pushes back on common objections to these tactics, such as the claim that rioters are engaging in self-defeating behavior. She quotes a viral video in which one Ferguson rioter says, “People want to say we’re destroying our own neighborhoods. We don’t own nothing out here!” Osterweil writes, “This . . . could be said of most majority black neighborhoods in America, which have much higher concentrations of chain stores and fast food restaurants than non-black neighborhoods . . . How could the average Ferguson resident really say it’s ‘our QuikTrip?’” She goes on to argue that liberal critics of looting are often hypocritical. “The same white liberals who inveigh against corporations for destroying local communities are aghast when rioters take their critique to its actual material conclusion,” she writes.

Now, Osterweil has expanded her essay into a book, *“In Defense of Looting: A Riotous History of Uncivil Action”*, out this August. In the book, Osterweil has developed the original essay into a searching examination of the origins and evolution of policing, race, and property rights. Ultimately, Osterweil demands we not only overcome the respectability politics animating our desire for “peaceful protests,” but that we work to abolish the racial capitalist logics at the heart of American empire—logics that, she argues, are contested by the very act of property damage. In light of the resurgent conversation about whether to divide the “looters” from the “peaceful protesters,” I spoke to Osterweil about her book and its view of property damage as essential to the erosion of the racist property relations

that uphold white supremacy—and the often fatal police violence that enforces it.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**Zoé Samudzi:** Can you describe the etymology of the word “looting” and how that informs its present racialized usage?

**Vicky Osterweil:** The word “loot” was taken from Hindi by [British] colonial officers. It first appears in English in an 1845 colonial officer’s handbook. From the very beginning it’s this really racializing word that contains the idea that Black and brown people were obsessed with plunder—that they had a deviant relationship to property, as opposed to the proper ownership embodied by the colonizers. This connotation persists today, which is why people are so reactive and defensive against the word. It really is a classic dog whistle. When Trump says, “When the looting starts the shooting starts,” we know he’s not talking about the white protesters who might be helping and participating. He’s talking about murdering black people.

**ZS:** In your book, you explain the relationship between property rights and the evolution of white supremacy and racial structures. You write, “Many historians have shown that strong, explicit racist ideology does not appear in the historical record in America until the revolutionary period, when the rights of man (and it is indeed man) became the defining philosophy of US politics. If the rights to liberty and property are inalienable, then what to do about all these people who are very clearly not in possession of liberty, or the capacity of property ownership?” To solve this conundrum, the colonists enforced the structure and hierarchy of race in America by designating white people as owners and Black people as things to be owned,

therefore joining racial identity and citizenship to property relations. How can we think about looting in the context of what you are describing as the racial roots of property?

**VO:** [The Jamaican writer and cultural theorist] Sylvia Wynter talks about this in her essay “No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues,” about the way LA police were referring to a black criminal underclass using the phrase “No Humans Involved,” or “NHI.” She uses that as a jumping-off point for her project about the construction of the human: how the idea of humanity itself is built on the denial of [human] status to Black people. This project of rights and legal bourgeois subjecthood is being built on a definition of humanity that necessarily has an outside: That outside is always African and Indigenous populations.

The enslaved—who were not only excluded from property ownership, but were themselves defined as property—understood innately that the concept of property made no sense. They would call just having a meeting “stealing” the meeting, and they would call escaping “stealing away.” Once you have been made into property by a society, then you recognize that any freedom you’re going to have has to be stolen.

**ZS:** You write, “This specter of slaves freeing themselves is American history’s first image of Black looters.” I really love the way you play with time, retroactively applying the word “looters” and connecting it to contemporary usage. It really allows us to connect the sheer magnitude of the state’s theft, trafficking, and enslavement of African people to its present fear of the Black looter destroying and stealing in return.

**VO:** For centuries, Black thinkers have been arguing that slavery didn’t actually end [after abolition and emancipation]. Frederick Douglass

was making that claim in the 1880s. Black studies scholar Christina Sharpe talks about how we have to understand the entire capitalist world as living in the wake of the techniques and modes of living that were produced in colonization and the slave trade. I think understanding that is really vital to breaking out of the progressive narrative that things have been getting better. In 1892, fewer people were getting lynched than are being killed every year by the police in America, which means there are more police lynchings now than there ever were at the height of lynching as a white fascist movement. None of these problems have gone away. There have been moments of uprising and resistance when they have been pushed back: Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Movement, even LA in 1992. But the fundamental structures never shift.

**ZS:** I often find that the real objection to property damage is about the fact that there’s always a caveat for the preservation and maintenance of Black life, a set of specific conditions under which most white people feel comfortable about allowing Black people to exist. You write that the “specter of slaves freeing themselves,” the fear of Black looting, is really the white fear of and objection to Black people choosing terms of existence beyond white law and order. It’s a kind of deep-seated existential objection—one that we just don’t see, for instance, in responses, even condemnatory ones, to white people rioting and setting things on fire after a big sports victory.

**VO:** I think there is a desire on white people’s behalf to deny the existence of the anti-Black, white supremacist state that we live in. They don’t want to believe in it! They live their lives organized around not believing in it even as they benefit from it.

Legal scholar Cheryl L. Harris, in her very important text “Whiteness as Property,”

argues that the ultimate property in society is whiteness. And for many white folks, especially in this country in 2020, [whiteness] may be the only property they own. Part of why so many have come out to the street this time is because they realize that the wages of whiteness have gotten really low. It's important to understand that whiteness and property are inextricable from each other: Without one there cannot be the other. We tend to think of property as tangible things or commodities, but it also includes rights, protections, and customs of possession passed down and ratified through law. Whiteness emerges as the race of people who are neither Indigenous nor enslavable—national identities are increasingly collapsed around the distinctions of slave/free and Black/white.

So when Black folks rise up and attack property, they're also attacking whiteness. That is an understanding that goes back to the plantation: When you attack your status as property, you attack whiteness as domination over you.

**ZS:** It's so interesting to think about the slogan we often see: Being pro-Black isn't anti-white. But if you're supporting Black people in the street protesting the police, if you're supporting white people protesting against the violence of the police, you are necessarily opposing whiteness.

**VO:** Yes. Whiteness only exists as the condition under which you can oppress Black and Indigenous people. That's the identity of whiteness. There is nothing [else] there. The peace of whiteness is a peace of the grave. It needs to be abolished—and if we're talking about abolishing whiteness, we're also talking about abolishing the police. Police evolved from slave patrols, slave catchers, colonial overseers

(in the Caribbean as well as Ireland), and as anti-riot forces designed to control new urban non-white populations. The earliest modern police force in the world was in Charleston, South Carolina: the City Guard. It existed mostly to control and terrorize the quarters where "hired out" enslaved people lived at some remove from their plantations and enslavers, and thus represented some small amount of autonomy, and the possibility of rebellion or organization—which was a threat to the white establishment. Further, one of the main [original] tasks of the NYPD, the earliest police force in the North, included enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act—kidnapping free Black people and sending them back into slavery—and putting down the anti-slave catcher riots that were a major part of the abolition movement in antebellum New York.

In other words, from the very beginning, police exist to prevent Black people from unsettling their status as property and threatening property itself, as well as to repress other unruly proles who might riot, refuse work, and otherwise attack property and its systems.

**ZS:** In discussions about looting, people sometimes categorize survival theft—for example, stealing food or baby formula when you need it—differently from what's seen as opportunistic, joyriding theft. Do you think that particular distinction really matters?

**VO:** No. I don't think so. Many people would, in moments of peace, encourage opportunism: They would tell you that you're just not working hard enough, you just need to get a better job, you need to better yourself. But when people who have been denied those legal "proper" routes toward wealth take an opportunistic moment to act, then suddenly opportunism becomes a crime. Then opportunism reveals



a sort of villainous or lazy disposition. This distinction ignores the law of value. If you were really broke and you go into a department store and you grab as much food as you can carry, that's going to last you a lot less long in terms of survival than grabbing a handful of jewelry. You can carry a lot more value out of a store in more valuable things.

This understanding also erases something essential about the act of looting, which is that it's actually really scary and tense and difficult. It's not just an easy solution to the problems you have. It also undermines the capitalist system by pointing to a way of relating to things and to each other that doesn't involve property. It's a way of immediately transforming your relation to the world around you. I think that's also part of what makes it so scary for onlookers, and why they want to divide between people stealing a bag of rice and people stealing a flat screen TV.

**ZS:** What about the distinction between looting from or damaging small businesses as opposed to chain stores or corporations?

**VO:** "Small business" has come to mean a "moral" business, a "good" thing. As anyone who has worked for small businesses can attest, small businesses often subject workers to just as much wage theft and workplace harm as large ones. Small businesses may occasionally uplift, but more often they prey on the poor as much as big businesses, just a little less profitably.

In the case of riots, as looting is usually done by people who live in the neighborhoods where it occurs, distinctions are often made between businesses that gentrify or oppress, and those that don't. Liquor stores, pawn shops, pharmacies, and gentro-cafes tend to be hit much more readily than the quaint "small business" the phrase is designed to evoke. I believe we should trust those who loot and riot to understand their

targets and their actions: to have analyzed the social world they live in, and therefore to trust them when they select the targets of their rage and resistance—especially when that rage is applied to property. No amount of lost business is worth more than a single lost life.

**ZS:** You quote the Black feminist scholar Saidiya Hartman—whom I consider the queen of pleasure and anarchy—describing Black people taking small moments of pleasure as "stealing away"—which, as you noted, is a phrase enslaved people used to talk about escaping. It's so interesting that the language used to talk about pleasure overlaps with the language of theft, the criminal and also self-emancipatory act of freeing oneself from bondage. This also makes me think about how the revolutionary Frantz Fanon talks about violence as an act of self-making. What do you think is the function or role of pleasure in looting? I don't think that part is negligible or apolitical.

**VO:** One of the things that scares police and politicians the most when they enter a riot zone—and there are quotes from across the 20th century of police and politicians saying this—is that it was happy: Everyone was happy. In the book, I quote a piece by the playwright Charles Fuller, who happened to be a young man starting out his career during the Philadelphia riots of 1964. He talks about the incredible sense of safety and joy and carnival that happens in the streets.

I think riots and militant violent action in general get slandered as being macho and bro-y, and lots of our male comrades like to project that sort of image. That definitely happens, but I actually think riots are incredibly femme. Riots are really emotive, an emotional way of expressing yourself. It is about pleasure and social reproduction. You care for one another



by getting rid of the thing that makes that impossible, which is the police and property. You attack the thing that makes caring impossible in order to have things for free, to share pleasure on the street. Obviously, riots are not the revolution

in and of themselves. But they gesture toward the world to come, where the streets are spaces where we are free to be happy, and be with each other, and care for each other.

For feedback, questions, or comments please email: [GeorgeFloydReader@protonmail.com](mailto:GeorgeFloydReader@protonmail.com)



